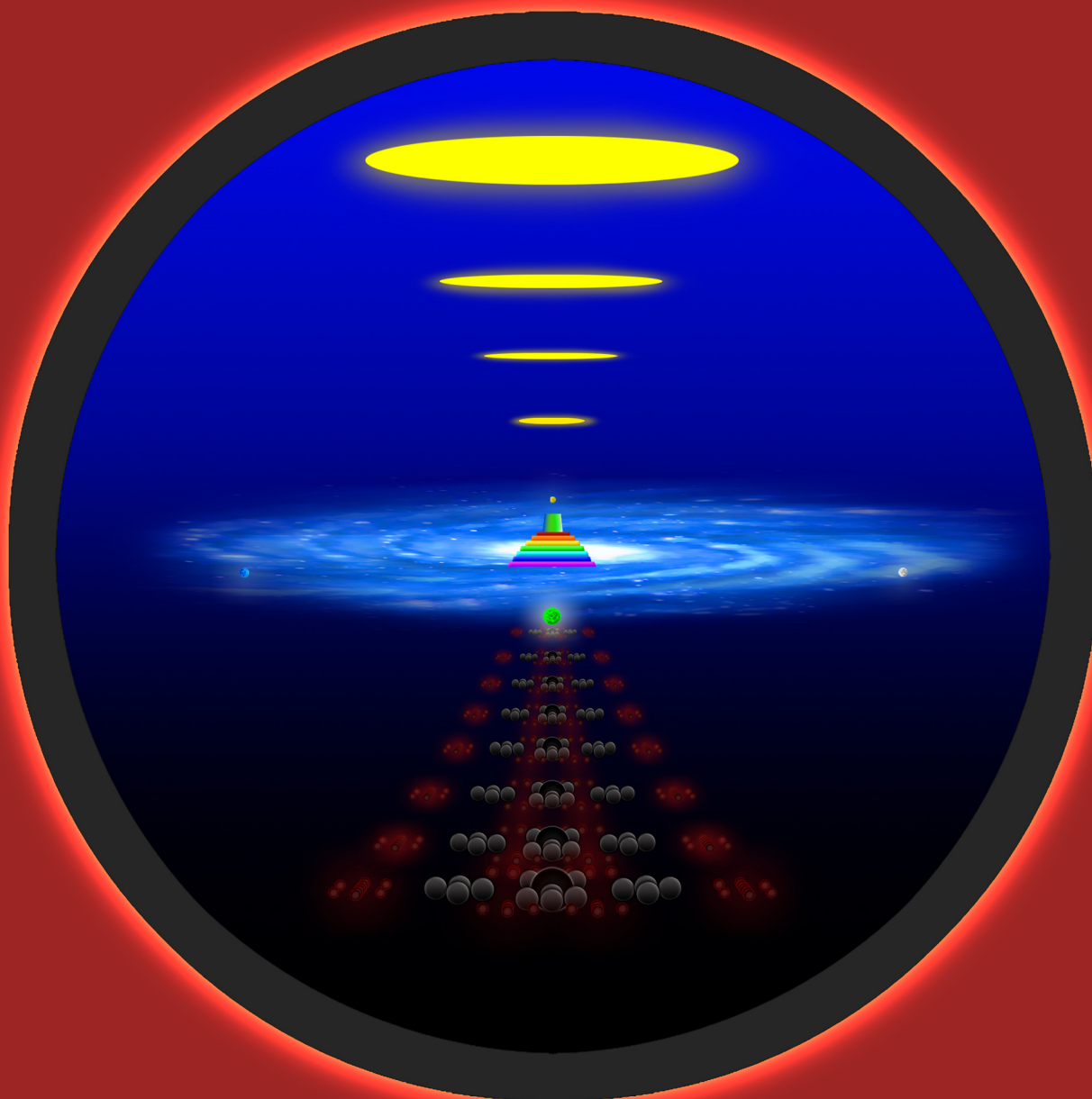




# BUDDHIST COSMOLOGY

GL 101E



**BUDDHIST  
COSMOLOGY**

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# **CHAPTER 1**

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## **A Basic Knowledge of Cosmology**

# Chapter 1

## A Basic Knowledge of Cosmology

### Units in this Chapter

#### 1.1 Important Terminologies To Be Studied

- 1.1.1 Cosmology Defined
- 1.1.2 Defining the Term 'This World'
- 1.1.3 Defining 'This World and the World to Come'

#### 1.2 Beliefs Concerning This World and The Next

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- 1.3.5 The Purpose of Studying Cosmology

### Chapter at a Glance

1. Before studying the nature of existence, it is important that students first have a grasp of key vocabulary such as 'Scientific Cosmology', 'Buddhist Cosmology', 'world', 'this world' and 'next world' and their definitions.
2. Most people doubt whether things they cannot see or touch really exist – such as this world or the next. Many people believe that life ends at death and that there is no further rebirth. Such an attitude can be a severe handicap to one' s understanding of Buddhist Cosmology. Therefore, students of cosmology need to have a proper understanding about this world and the next.
3. In the present day, knowledge about the world and the universe is obtained chiefly from research and empirical testing. Knowledge obtained in such a way tends to be incomplete and thus changes all the time. By contrast, the knowledge the Lord Buddha discovered about the nature of the universe came from meditational research. Unlike scientific knowledge, this kind of knowledge [*vijja*] is unchanging.

## Chapter Objectives

Students will have the knowledge, the understanding and will be able to:

1. Define important words in this chapter.
2. Explain the effects on our lives of disbelief concerning this world and the next.
3. Explain the sources of Buddhist Cosmological knowledge.

## Introduction

The great advances of materialism and technology in the present day have brought comfort to humanity and ease to our lives. Science has had a very important role in developing this technology. Some might even go so far as to say that science has *improved* humanity. Science has unravelled the mysteries of Nature, the world and the universe. These discoveries have been important to us because these phenomena are our human living space and affect human lives. Thus, theories on the world and the universe are always topical. In addition, more and more organizations dedicated to cosmological research have been established – meaning that the subject is widely taught at educational institutions around the world.

In fact, technological analysis of the nature of the world and the universe is only *one* approach to this subject. Buddhism also has techniques of examining the nature of the world and the universe. Some of the Buddhist conclusions concur with scientific discoveries while others contrast. This course unit aims to cover the Buddhist approach to cosmology. Before starting on the content of Buddhist Cosmology, this first chapter will introduce some basic terms that will equip students to tackle concepts in chapters to come. Although there may be other curricula available in the world which deal with Buddhist Cosmology – it is usually a rare choice of study. Dhammakaya Open University, California however considers this subject a foundation to subsequent Buddhist study.

## 1.1 Important Terminologies to be Studied

The first task in this chapter is to present the translation and meaning of some important but potentially confusing terminologies in Cosmology.

### 1.1.1 Cosmology Defined

The word, cosmology, is made up of two parts which are ‘cosmo-’ derived from the word, ‘cosmos’ defined as the universe thought of as a systematically arranged, harmonious whole<sup>1</sup>. The second part of the word cosmology, ‘-ology’ means the study of. Therefore, the word ‘cosmology’ means:<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Webster’s II New College Dictionary (Boston, USA: Houghton Mifflin Company 1995) p.255

<sup>2</sup> Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (Harlow and London: The Pitman Press, 1978), p.248

The science of the origin and structure of the universe, especially as studied in Astronomy.

This definition helps us understand the oft-studied science-based meaning of the word.

However, when we refer to the Buddhist-based meaning; no one has yet offered a clear explanation. Thus, for the purposes of this text, Buddhist Cosmology is defined as:

A study of the origins of the world, the universe and all life forms as found in its origins, perpetuation and decay as represented scripturally in the Lord Buddha's teachings.

There is a difference between the definitions of cosmology in science and Buddhism, because the issues under examination in both sorts of cosmology are similar (they include the world and the universe where we live in), however the *purpose* of study in the two forms of cosmology are different. The science-based explanation of the universe aims merely to expand knowledge of new discoveries using the scientific tools. Buddhist Cosmology, by contrast, is the study of eternal truths about the universe based on the teachings of the Lord Buddha which aim to raise the awareness of the student to an accurate understanding of the nature of life and the world.

### 1.1.2 Defining the Term 'This World'

A certain word which crops up in virtually every chapter of this unit is the word 'world'. People tend to understand the meaning of this word only in its narrowest sense -- of being a certain planet in our solar system. However the meaning of world as used in Buddhism is much broader than that. Therefore, we need to understand it in its broader sense.

The meaning of word 'world' as it comes from the Buddhist Scriptures – i.e. the Pali word '*loka*' -- has three levels of description<sup>3</sup> which are the World of Formations [*sa"nkhaara-loka*], World of Location [*okaasa-loka*] and World of Beings [*satta-loka*]. In all three worlds, all living creatures have senses in either form or formless. Form object and formless objects are called the World of Beings. World that can be separated out into lakes and mountains is called the World of Location. Psychophysical constituents or aggregates in both worlds are called the World of Formations.

In the general meaning of the word 'world' in the Asian sense means:

1. The planet Earth (the fifth largest planet in our solar system, the third planet from the sun, having a sidereal period of revolution about the sun of 265.26 days at a mean distance of 92.96 million miles or approx. 149 million kilometres, an axial rotation period of 23 hours 25.07 minutes, an equatorial

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<sup>3</sup> Bahujanahita Sutta or Loka Sutta It.78



radius of 3,963 miles or approx. 6,378 kilometres and a mass of 5.974 x 10<sup>24</sup> kilograms.) but also

2. A collective term for the human world, the heaven realms and the Brahma realms as a dwelling place for living beings and other forms of life. These realms together are spherical in shape.

In the meaning of the word 'world' in the Buddhist textbooks<sup>4</sup> has broad meaning. The narrow meaning even covers in three parts and each one has its own particular meaning.

1. **World of Formations [sa"nkhaara-loka]** meaning the bodies of humans and other life forms which are composed of the body and the mind/spirit.
2. **World of Beings [satta-loka]** meaning all living beings apart from ourselves -- for example, human beings and animals/ beasts, etc.
3. **World of Location [okaasa-loka]** which means the location in which the animal world lives. It is where people make a living and the place where one performs acts of karma, both good and bad. Thus the world on this level of description includes the Earth (on land), water, skies and the universe.

The meanings of the world found so far helps us know that the world is not merely the dwelling place for human beings and other life forms. But the world has a much deeper meanings which can be explained in three parts: the world of formations, world of location and world of beings. There is such broad meaning because the Lord Buddha surveyed the reality of the world with complete accuracy through his precise faculty of seeing and knowing. Nothing could be hidden from his knowledge.

From the world meaning as mentioned above, the reader will realize that the cosmology under examination in this course unit is primarily the 'world of location' and this includes the human realm in a metaphysical sense, which like the planet Earth in the astronomical sense is also a place of existence for human beings and a part of the universe as a whole. The components of this universe will be the subject matter of further chapters.

### 1.1.3 Defining 'This World' and the 'World to Come'

Further definitions that need to be understood are the terms '**this world**' and '**the next world**'. These terms are derived from Buddhist Scriptures [*tipi.taka*]. Belief in the existence of these two worlds are included amongst the ten items of Right View [*sammaa-di.t.thi*], which in turn is the first path factor of the Noble Eightfold Path [*a.t.tha"ngika-magga*] – where Right View refers to an accurate understanding about life and the world.

The term 'this world' refers to all three levels of description of the word 'world' whether it be the world of beings, or location or of formations. It can be concluded

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<sup>4</sup> Such as *Inside Understanding* Phrabhavanaviriyakhun (2004) (mss. as yet unpublished in English) p.45

that the world is simply a place where worldly beings dwell, including our mind and all the other animals. It refers to our present existence from now until the time of our death. This world is a world of differences. Everybody is differentiated by their physical body, wealth, status, intelligence and predisposition. Studying the Lord Buddha's teachings help us realize that the differences between us came from actions we have done ourselves in the past. The degree of our good and bad actions in the past affect our quality of life in 'this world'.

The term 'the world to come' has two meanings which are:

### **1. Life after Death**

This implies that once humans and other animals die, it is not the end of the story. Our physical existence comes to an end when our corpse is cremated or buried – however, the mind goes on for as long as there are still mental defilements remaining. The being will take a new birth and receive a new physical form – the details of which can not yet be predicted.

### **2. The Realms of Existence of Beings in Their Life after Death**

It is certain that once a being arises, it is necessary to have a substrate or a location where that being can exist. From our experience in this world, it is easy to imagine that if a person is born into a wealthy, famous family they will take on a location which is comfortable. On the other hand, if a person is born into a poor family, they would take on a location full of hardship.

Therefore, it can be concluded that it is hard to predict the exact form the world to come will take for any particular being -- but it is certain that we have to prepare ourselves for the world to come for as long as we still have defilements in our minds.

## **1.2 Beliefs Concerning This World and the Next**

People of different cultures have different beliefs depending on where they live and the religious teachings available to them. This causes different habits of thought, speech and action especially those concerning their beliefs about this world and the next. There are people who deny the existence of this world or the next. This kind of belief influences the way they think, speak and act. Such beliefs were in existence many thousands of years before the arising of the Lord Buddha. Even after the Lord Buddha arose in the world, doubts about the existence of this world and the next have been propagated by religious teachers down to the present day.

As a result of his enlightenment the Lord Buddha was able to see the nature of existence according to its reality. He could see how living beings were reborn according to their karma allowing him to know that denial of the existence of this world and the next world is erroneous – being one amongst the negative attitudes to the world known in Buddhism as False View [*micchaa-di.t.thi*].

It is therefore important to understand about the true nature of this world and the next, whether they exist or not and the disadvantages of denying their existence – and ultimately whether it is of any benefit to study cosmology at all, since it is intimately connected with the existence of this world and the next.

### 1.2.1 Evidence for the Existence of This World and the Next

Denial of the existence of this world is nothing new. It is a belief that has been around for a long time and continues to exist for as long as people have no access to the Buddha's teaching. The Lord Buddha taught us to believe in the existence of this world and the next – or, put another way, that death is not the end of the story. This also attests to the fact that good deeds and bad deeds do not end in this world, but are carried over to affect the perpetrator in the afterlife.

It is a guarantee that when we die, we must be reborn elsewhere for as long as our defilements are not completely extinguished. What form we take in the afterlife is another story. Evidence for the existence of this world and the next exist is as follows:

#### 1. The Logical Argument

If when we die, death is the end of the story, this implies that our present lifetime is our first because past lives cannot exist. All differences between people would have to come about either by 'nature' or by 'nurture'. If we really were born in this world for the first time, then those with the same 'nature' such as identical twins should be exactly the same in every way, whether it be their appearance or their personality, because they are genetically identical. However, even after birth, they are still not alike. If it were 'nurture' that accounted for the differences between people, brothers and sisters brought up by the same parents would behave the same – however this is obviously not the case. If one is to deny the existence of past lives it is difficult to explain such differences. However, if karma accumulated during past lives is taken into account the differences can easily be accounted for by the unequal amount of merit and demerit accumulated in the past by each individual. As mentioned in the Lord Buddha in conversation with Subha Todeyyaputta<sup>5</sup> that an individual's quality of life depends on their past karma:

*“All beings own their own karma, are heir to their karma,  
have karma as their origin, karma as their family,  
as their clan and abide in their karma.  
Karma dictates the coarse or refined quality of life of each being.”*

In summary, each individual is born different because of the karmic retribution of their own actions, speech and thought in the past. Therefore, when the identical twins are born in this world, their past karma is not the same even though they have the same mother and father. This logically supports the existence of this world and the next.

2. **Practical Argument:** if a person believes that death is the end of the story they will have no motivation to do good deeds because any good karma accrued thereby would disappear when one died. So thinking, if they fail to do any good deeds throughout their lives they will certainly live a life of hardship reaping the retribution of the bad deeds they have done in the place of good ones. If a person denies the existence of this world and the next, thinking that death is the end of the story, they will have no scruples about doing bad

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<sup>5</sup> Cula-kammavibhanga Sutta (M.iii.202ff)

deeds. Their life will be one of hardship. If it turned out that death was the end of the story one would merely 'break even' but if it turned out that there was an afterlife where retribution could return to us, the next world would be even more difficult than the present one. On the contrary, a person who believes in the existence of the afterlife will be motivated to do good deeds throughout their life. They will lead a happy life. If they die and find there is no afterlife, there is no harm done. However, if it does happen that there is an afterlife, then their next life will be filled with even more happiness.

Examination of this world and the next is presented here to provide a foundation to the following chapters. This is not to detract from beliefs the reader may already possess – but to encourage students to remain open-minded and give the description of the world and cosmology which follows, the benefit of the doubt.

### **1.2.2 Essential Things to Understand about This World**

It is essential to understand the following things about this world as follows:

1. *This world has an origin* means that beings in this world and the state they find themselves in, whether it be their appearance, financial status, intelligence or disposition all happen because of reasons – which means the karma they have done in the past.
2. *The uncertainty of this world* means the world changes all the time and nothing is permanent. For example, we are born strong and healthy but may become sick at a later date if we are not careful about our health in the present.
3. *This world is of benefit to us* refers especially to the world at the level of meaning of our bodies -- because the human body is particularly suitable for the cultivation of merits and many different kinds of good karma. Bodies of other animals, whether they have many feet or few or no feet at all, are not able to do good deeds easily like human beings can. If referring to the world at the level of meaning of our environment we see that the human realm is the only location that is appropriate for doing good deeds. It is here we can meet with good friends [*kalyaa.namitta*] including parents, teachers, friends and monks who can help to advise us how to do good deeds.
4. *This world has only limited time available* means that our time in this world is limited by our inevitable death. However, we cannot know the time of our death in advance. It depends on the good deeds or bad deeds that each person has done in their past and present lives.

### 1.2.3 Benefits of Having a Correct Understanding of This World

Keeping these four features of this world in mind will help us gain the wisdom to teach ourselves to selectively cultivate only good karma in the present as best we can, inspiring us to:

1. Do only good karma from this day forth because when our good fortune in this world, is dependent on the fruits of good karma cultivated in our past lives. The effects of the good karma in our past will one day run out, which is why we need to be quick to do more good deeds.
2. Strictly avoid doing bad karma at all out of awe for the countless harmful forms of retribution coming from bad karma which can affect us, our friends around the world and our natural surroundings.
3. Avoid just sit around and doing nothing or neglecting to cultivate any good karma at all. The act of doing nothing not only brings us no benefit but lets the merits that we have accumulated in the past run out, while the remaining time we have available to cultivate merit shortens every day.
4. Realize that we ought to use our physical body to the maximum benefit in cultivating good deeds. Whether our body be healthy or disabled, we should study the Law of Karma to the point of understanding and choose to do only good deeds. Even if our body is handicapped, we can still use it to do good deeds.

### 1.2.4 Preparing Correctly for the World to Come

Having recognized the benefits of this world, it is essential to prepare for the world to come. Preparing for life after death includes four practices as follows:

1. *Having faith in the working of the law of karma.* We must study the law of Karma and truly understand it because we must quit evil doing and do more good deeds.
2. *Keeping one's precepts strictly.* One should keep at least the Five Precepts. Better still one should try to keep the Eight Precepts from time to time or better still, for the rest of ones life. Besides increasing ones merit, keeping the precepts will purify one in body, speech and mind.
3. *Practising generosity to the full.* After we die, we cannot take our bodies or possessions with us, but we can take the merit with us which has resulted from doing generous deeds.
4. *Improve upon your wisdom more and more.* This can be done by meditating and stilling our minds to the point it is radiant and can see things according to their reality.

In summary, this is the knowledge of this world and the next exist as indicated in the Lord Buddha's teachings. We study cosmology here to better understand this world and the next and to gain Right View on these issues. Such understanding will allow us to choose a way of life that is beneficial during our short time as a human instead of having to waste time learning by trial and error.

### **1.3 Sources of Buddhist Cosmological Knowledge**

All human beings are ignorant when they come into the world – with more questions in their minds than answers. If we try to remember back to our experiences when we were first born, there is probably very little we can remember about how we thought or felt at that time. If we were to remember, we would find that we were filled with wonder for everything we saw, touched or heard from the first moments after our birth. Once we became able to speak, we'd start to ask our parents questions about everything new to us. Even as young adults, our curiosity about our surroundings hardly diminished. But this curiosity would perhaps be different in nature from our curiosity as a child and perhaps even now as adults do we keep some of our curiosity.

Of all the mysteries of existence, the issue of the world's creation is what people have paid the most attention to, both in philosophy and science. We treat the origin of our planet with such interest because we are reliant on our planet for our survival. We need to know as much as possible about our planet so that we can continue to live in this world in safety and happiness.

The remainder of this chapter shows how Buddhist methodology can be useful in answering questions about the world and universe -- a method different to that of science. The conclusions drawn by Buddhist methodology may have similarities as well as differences from the conclusions drawn by scientific methodology.

#### **1.3.1 Searching for Knowledge in Buddhism**

Buddhism has a name for being a religion that is based on reason. The Lord Buddha did not claim to have a monopoly on all the different knowledge that makes up Buddhism. If anyone spoke the truth, the Lord Buddha acknowledged it as such. The truth that we speak of here is referred to in Buddhism as 'Dhamma'. The Lord Buddha is not the inventor or owner of the Dhamma. The Dhamma is merely the nature of things in the life and the world. If anyone is able to reach Enlightenment, that person becomes able to discern the real nature of the things they see in the world around them. These observations, or Dhamma, were something the Lord Buddha chose to share with the people of the world so that they too could benefit from true knowledge about the nature of things. In just the same way, scientific laws existed in the world long before scientists discovered them. The dictionary of Buddhism<sup>6</sup> indicates that:

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<sup>6</sup> Paticcasamuppapada-katha of the Kathaavathu 81/18 verse 1086

“Whether the Lord Buddha exists or not, the Dhamma that still exists as universal law [*dhammaniyaama*]. Once the Buddha had seen those laws, he related them to others, set models, described principles and explained them in a way easy to understand saying ‘Look for yourselves!’”

In this context, Dhamma means the laws of nature -- the Dhamma that the Lord Buddha researched as being innumerable. It is because of the Lord Buddha’s special faculty for ‘seeing and knowing’ [*ñāa.nadassana*] which is so broad it penetrates the nature of all things that we refer to his knowledge as ‘all knowing’ [*sabbaññutañāa.na*]. However, the Lord Buddha did not teach the whole of Dhamma to the people of the world because some content does nothing to facilitate progress on the pathway to Enlightenment. The Lord Buddha shared only the items of Dhamma which would allow others to attain enlightenment (attaining which they would be able to see the nature of the remaining Dhammas for themselves). However, the *Dhammas* which the Lord Buddha taught mankind can be compared to a handful of leaves. The *Dhammas* that the Lord Buddha knew but chose not to teach can be compared with all the leaves in the forest as mentioned in Si.msapaa Sutta<sup>7</sup> that:

At one time, the Lord Buddha travelled to a Si.msapa forest. He picked up some Si.msapa leaves and then asked all the monks around him “Which is the more – the Si.msapa leaves that I hold in my hands or the leaves on all the Si.msapa trees in the forest?” The monks replied, “There are more Si.msapa leaves in the whole forest than in your hands.” The Lord Buddha explained “Similarly, the knowledge which I have not shared with you is more than that which I have taught. The knowledge that I have shared with you is a small proportion just like the leaves in my hands because the other types of knowledge do not serve their purpose. They do not help to reduce preoccupation with sensuality or to relieve suffering.”

### 1.3.2 Cosmology as Part of the Lord Buddha’s Knowledge

Cosmology is a part of the knowledge which the Lord Buddha discovered. And the Lord Buddha knew that all phenomena came about as a result of natural laws, which are called Universal Laws [*dhammaniyaama*]. The Lord Buddha gave more of a summary of the content of Universal laws, rather than a specific description. Afterwards, commentarians expanded the content further and more thoroughly. In these written texts, there were written five categories of natural laws:

1. **Physical Laws** [*utuniyaama*] are natural laws which cover the manifestation of all non-living things, for example, the occurrence of thunder and lightening. The arising and falling away of this world even follow these natural laws. Western Buddhist textbooks tend to say that the Ancient Indians had no idea what caused the patterns in Nature but Buddhism attributed these patterns to physical laws.

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<sup>7</sup> S.v.437

2. **Biological Laws** [*bijaniyaama*] are natural laws which are particular to animate objects like plants or animals. These natural laws dictate that when we plant a rice seed it grows into a rice plant. The offspring an elephant gives birth to must be a baby elephant. Buddhism attributes this predictability to biological laws.
3. **Psychological Laws** [*cittaniyaama*] are natural laws which deal with the mechanisms of how the mind works. Buddhism believes that people are made up of two main parts: namely body and mind. The mind is composed of the system which allows us to work, change and act in a way which is individual to each person. Buddhism attributes such dynamics to psychological laws.
4. **Karmic Laws** [*kammaniyaama*]: are laws concerning how karma gives its effects. Karma refers to intentional actions. The virtue of the intention behind the act divides karma into two types: good karma and bad karma. Good karma is reciprocated with positive fruits. Bad karma is reciprocated with negative retribution. This type of law is also referred to as the Law of Karma.
5. **Universal Laws** [*dhammaniyaama*]: are natural laws that deal with cause and effect where they concern the mental and physical phenomena. This law has the broadest definition and is an umbrella for all the four types of laws already mentioned.

The Lord Buddha discovered all five of these natural laws but did not teach all of them. He taught only Universal laws with a focus on Psychological and Karmic Laws. The Lord Buddha taught very little of Physical and Biological Law. On the contrary, science emphasizes the Physical and Biological Laws within Universal Law. Science has little or no interest in Karmic or Psychological Law. This is one point that distinguishes Buddhism from Science. Buddhism takes a broader overall perspective of life and the world than Science.

An important point to realize is that Universal laws encompass all the other four types of law. Even though it is true that Buddhism focuses on Karmic and Psychological Laws, it does not reject Physical or Biological Laws which are the focus of scientific endeavour. Therefore, Buddhism tends not to conflict with Science.

Once equipped with the dhammas allowing us to become enlightened, we will be able to know that there is even more material that the Lord Buddha discovered but did not share with us. The material that he did teach was only the part to relieve the immediate suffering which is a huge concern in all our lives.

### 1.3.3 Sources of Buddhist Cosmological Knowledge

Empirical testing, using equipment external to the body, which is the source of most scientific knowledge is correct only from certain perspectives. In cases where empirical studies give correct results, it is usually because the subject matter of the research is not so complicated and usually the research results are not altogether thorough. The efficacy of the research is limited because of the limitations of the research tools.



Another way to obtain knowledge and see things correctly is the study by mind, which does not have to rely on any tools. It needs only a mind sufficiently clear to gain internal vision. Having a still and stable mind gained by meditating in a proper way consistently is a starting point to discover the truth about life. Once successful, knowledge is gained from images appearing in mind or in Buddhist terminology, the faculty of 'seeing and knowing' [*ñānadassana*] or seeing through the power of mind.

Those of us belonging to the scientific age may have our reservations about the potential of the mind for discovering universal laws – thus we need first to explore how the mind functions. The original state of the mind is crystal clear. However, once the mind becomes engrained with defilements, the mind takes on an abnormal condition becoming clouded, distorted and scattered reducing the quality of the mind poorer and undermining its power. However, if the mind is cultivated to the point of stillness (bringing the faculties of perception, memory, thought and knowledge to a single point at the middle of the body our mind will regain its power. It is similar to the way scattered sunlight if focused by a lens creates a spot with enough heat to burn a hole. Our mind is very similar. Once the mind is concentrated in stillness on a single spot, our thought will go deeper instead of scattering; hence, the mind gains the power to do many amazing things.

To give another example – normally we consider the speed of light as the fastest possible speed in the universe. However, the speed of light is still slower than that of the mind. Supposing we have recently visited a country ten thousand miles away and we reminisce, our mind takes only a fraction of a second to be back in that country again. Our mind can travel not only in the present but can even leap to the past and the future. This is the miracle of mind.

Knowledge coming from the trained mind is not exclusive to Buddhism but in fact predates it. The hermits, ascetics and the spiritual leaders of ancient times focused their minds to access knowledge by visions seen in the mind, but the images they saw may have been fragmented or incomplete. They taught others of their knowledge revealing such things as the knowledge of heaven or the Brahma-world. They assumed the highest realms of existence they saw were the ultimate.

The Buddha arose in the world as a result of training himself over the course of innumerable lifetimes and consequently had a complete knowledge about the nature of things animate and inanimate in the world, the arising and decay of the world, cosmology and the origin of all things. He passed on this knowledge to others – a body of knowledge [*vijjā*] which is the highest level of knowledge in Buddhism. This supreme knowledge is known as the Threefold Knowledge [*tevijja*] and consists of:

1. *Knowledge of one's own previous lifetimes* [*pubbenivaasanussatiñāa.nā*]. This is the ability to recollect the ones own past lives from one, two, ten, a hundred or a thousand lifetimes ago.
2. *Knowledge of the previous lifetimes of others* [*cutuupapaatañāa.nā*]. This is the ability to know how beings' karma affects their birth and death in the cycle of existence – giving them better or worse quality of life, whether it be refined or coarse complexions, wealth or poverty. Another name for this ability is the celestial eye [*dibbhacakkhu*].

### 3. *Knowledge of an end of all defilements [asavakkhayañāa.na].*

This Threefold Knowledge, especially the recollection of his own previous lifetimes, allowed the Buddha to know about the evolution of the Earth because he could recall his former existences from times during the arising and decay of the Earth. The fact that there were such eras for the Buddha to learn about proves that the Earth has not always been as it is now – and the same goes for the universe and everything else. By practicing the Buddhist doctrine, one day we too can reach the point of illumination where we can prove the nature of the earth and universe for ourselves.

#### 1.3.4 **Buddhist Cosmology Is Unfathomable by Conceptual Thought**

As previously mentioned, Buddhism is a religion based on reasoning. However, there are some issues that the Lord Buddha did not advocate people to speculate about rationally. Buddha designated such things unfathomable by conceptual thought. Although at first sight this might seem to be contradictory, in fact the Buddha realized the limitations of mundane understanding. It needs enough meditation to have insight into these matters as already mentioned in the account of the origin of Buddhist cosmological knowledge. The Buddha's explanation of issues unfathomable by conceptual thought appeared in Acintita Sutta<sup>8</sup> as follows:

1. *The powers of the Buddha [buddhavisāya] -- i.e., the range of powers a Buddha develops as a result of becoming a Buddha.*
2. *The powers developed through the absorptions [~naa.navisāya] -- i.e., the range of powers that one may obtain while they reach absorptions in meditation.*
3. *The outcome or the retribution of our actions -- i.e. the precise outcomes of karmic action.*
4. *Philosophical analysis of the nature of the world -- i.e. conjecture about (the origin, etc., of) the world.*

From this Sutta, we will see that speculating about (for example) who created the Earth, how it happened, or how the Earth will come to its end are unfathomable by conceptual thought so we should not become preoccupied with them or else one may be driven insane. It is a very long time span over which our Earth comes into existence, perpetuates and decays that it can only be calculated in terms of incalculable eons [asañkheyya kappa]. It is impossible to prove empirically. The more one conceptualizes about it the more confusing it becomes – until one can finally become insane.

What we should really become preoccupied with is how to break free from this world. We ought to use the arising and decay to arouse a sense of urgency in cultivating good deeds to escape the cycle of existence such as training our mind in meditation

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<sup>8</sup> A.ii.80

to prove the real nature of these questions after we have come to an end of all defilements.

### 1.3.5 The Purpose of Studying Cosmology

The initial stages of Buddhist teachings focuses on encouraging people to cultivate good deeds and adjusting themselves to break free from suffering. As a result of following such teachings they fulfil the true goal of their lives to become free from defilements, attain nirvana and break free from the cycle of existence. As our lifetime on this the world is short, we do not have the time to spare to remain ignorant about such things as cosmology.

Thus on subjects such as cosmology, the Buddha did not teach in detail but merely explained the parts necessary to be able to comprehend the arising, perpetuation and decay of worldly phenomena. Equipped with his teachings, people become wary of sensuality and inspired to meditate in accordance with an example given in the Buddhist scriptures:<sup>9</sup>

At the time, Malu"nkya became a monk in Buddhism. He wanted clear answers about whether the Earth be permanent or impermanent, about this world and the next. The monk Malu"nkya suspected that the Buddha *could* not answer ten certain questions including that of the permanence of the Earth and whether there will be an end to the world. He requested the Buddha to answer those questions saying that if the Lord Buddha knew the answer, he should leave no shadow of a doubt in Malu"nkya's mind. However, if the Lord Buddha did not know the answer, he should admit it. If the Lord Buddha did not answer anything, he would retire from monkhood.

The Lord Buddha asked him, "Did I ever persuade you to ordain to have these questions answered?" The monk Malu"nkya agreed he never had.

The Lord Buddha continued by saying that even if someone were to threaten to disrobe if not receiving answers to those questions that person would die before the Buddha agreed to answer them. It is like a man who got shot by a poison arrow. Even his relatives tried to take him to the doctor to heal him, he refused to allow the doctor to take the arrow out, until somebody told him who shot him, what was his name, whether the answer was tall or short, black or white, where he lived, what was the arrow made from and so forth. This man would die unnecessarily if he kept asking those useless questions. The urgent need for him was to cure his suffering, not to have his questions answered.

Finally, the Buddha concluded that he would only give the answer concerning issues that help bring people to the end of suffering, extract themselves from sensuality, be peaceful, happy, gain wisdom and knowledge and attain Nirvana.

This Sutta demonstrates that Buddha would not respond with useless knowledge. Some of the questions that the monk Malu"nkya asked, like those about this world

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<sup>9</sup> Cuu.lamalu"nkayovaada Sutta M.i.426ff.

and the next are unfathomable by conceptual thought. Such issues are further knowledge. Conceptual answers to such questions are no use in helping us to free ourselves from suffering. Instead we should focus ourselves on practice until we succeed – only in this way can we really learn more. Just as the man who got shot by the arrow would perish if he insisted on finding out who the archer was and so forth, as a practitioner our progress will be compromised if we waste time searching for useless answers.

Cosmology is amongst the issues unfathomable by conceptual thought. The Buddha taught the Cūḷavaṇṇasutta to warn people not to be reckless and to gain a sense of urgency by the impermanence of the world. He taught us to use the short space of our lives to perform the maximum of good deeds to reach the truths of life accessible only by meditation.

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# **CHAPTER 2**

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## **The Building Blocks of Life & the World**

# **CHAPTER 1**

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## **A Basic Knowledge of Cosmology**

# Chapter 1

## A Basic Knowledge of Cosmology

### Units in this Chapter

#### 1.1 Important Terminologies To Be Studied

- 1.1.1 Cosmology Defined
- 1.1.2 Defining the Term 'This World'
- 1.1.3 Defining 'This World and the World to Come'

#### 1.2 Beliefs Concerning This World and the Next

- 1.2.1 Evidence for the Existence of This World and the Next
- 1.2.2 Essential Things to Understand about This World
- 1.2.3 Benefits of **Having a** Correct Understanding of This World
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#### 1.3 Sources of Buddhist Cosmological Knowledge

- 1.3.1 Searching for Knowledge in Buddhism
- 1.3.2 Cosmology **as** Part of the Lord Buddha' s Knowledge
- 1.3.3 Sources of Buddhist Cosmological Knowledge
- 1.3.4 Buddhist Cosmology **is** Unfathomable by Conceptual Thought
- 1.3.5 The Purpose of Studying Cosmology

### Chapter at a Glance

1. Before studying the nature of existence, it is important that students first have a grasp of key vocabulary such as 'Scientific Cosmology', 'Buddhist Cosmology', 'world', 'this world' and 'next world' and their definitions.
2. Most people doubt whether things they cannot see or touch really exist – such as this world or the next. Many people believe that life ends at death and that there is no further rebirth. Such an attitude can be a severe handicap to one' s understanding of Buddhist Cosmology. Therefore, students of cosmology need to have a proper understanding about this world and the next.
3. In the present day, knowledge about the world and the universe is obtained chiefly from research and empirical testing. Knowledge obtained in such a way tends to be incomplete and thus changes all the time. By contrast, the knowledge the Lord Buddha discovered about the nature of the universe came from meditational research. Unlike scientific knowledge, this kind of knowledge [*vijja*] is unchanging.

## Chapter Objectives

Students will have the knowledge, the understanding and will be able to:

1. Define important words in this chapter.
2. Explain the effects on our lives of disbelief concerning this world and the next.
3. Explain the sources of Buddhist Cosmological knowledge.

## Introduction

The great advances of materialism and technology in the present day have brought comfort to humanity and ease to our lives. Science has had a very important role in developing this technology. Some might even go so far as to say that science has *improved* humanity. Science has unravelled the mysteries of Nature, the world and the universe. These discoveries have been important to us because these phenomena are our human living space and affect human lives. Thus, theories on the world and the universe are always topical. In addition, more and more organizations dedicated to cosmological research have been established – meaning that the subject is widely taught at educational institutions around the world.

In fact, technological analysis of the nature of the world and the universe is only *one* approach to this subject. Buddhism also has techniques of examining the nature of the world and the universe. Some of the Buddhist conclusions concur with scientific discoveries while others contrast. This course unit aims to cover the Buddhist approach to cosmology. Before starting on the content of Buddhist Cosmology, this first chapter will introduce some basic terms that will equip students to tackle concepts in chapters to come. Although there may be other curricula available in the world which deal with Buddhist Cosmology – it is usually a rare choice of study. Dhammakaya Open University, California however considers this subject a foundation to subsequent Buddhist study.

## 1.1 Important Terminologies to be Studied

The first task in this chapter is to present the translation and meaning of some important but potentially confusing terminologies in Cosmology.

### 1.1.1 Cosmology Defined

The word, cosmology, is made up of two parts which are ‘cosmo-’ derived from the word, ‘cosmos’ defined as the universe thought of as a systematically arranged, harmonious whole<sup>1</sup>. The second part of the word cosmology, ‘-ology’ means the study of. Therefore, the word ‘cosmology’ means:<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Webster’s II New College Dictionary (Boston, USA: Houghton Mifflin Company 1995) p.255

<sup>2</sup> Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (Harlow and London: The Pitman Press, 1978), p.248



The science of the origin and structure of the universe, especially as studied in Astronomy.

This definition helps us understand the oft-studied science-based meaning of the word.

However, when we refer to the Buddhist-based meaning; no one has yet offered a clear explanation. Thus, for the purposes of this text, Buddhist Cosmology is defined as:

A study of the origins of the world, the universe and all life forms as found in its origins, perpetuation and decay as represented scripturally in the Lord Buddha's teachings.

There is a difference between the definitions of cosmology in science and Buddhism, because the issues under examination in both sorts of cosmology are similar (they include the world and the universe where we live in), however the *purpose* of study in the two forms of cosmology are different. The science-based explanation of the universe aims merely to expand knowledge of new discoveries using the scientific tools. Buddhist Cosmology, by contrast, is the study of eternal truths about the universe based on the teachings of the Lord Buddha which aim to raise the awareness of the student to an accurate understanding of the nature of life and the world.

### 1.1.2 Defining the Term 'This World'

A certain word which crops up in virtually every chapter of this unit is the word 'world'. People tend to understand the meaning of this word only in its narrowest sense -- of being a certain planet in our solar system. However the meaning of world as used in Buddhism is much broader than that. Therefore, we need to understand it in its broader sense.

The meaning of word 'world' as it comes from the Buddhist Scriptures – i.e. the Pali word '*loka*' -- has three levels of description<sup>3</sup> which are the World of Formations [*sa"nkhaara-loka*], World of Location [*okaasa-loka*] and World of Beings [*satta-loka*]. In all three worlds, all living creatures have senses in either form or formless. Form object and formless objects are called the World of Beings. World that can be separated out into lakes and mountains is called the World of Location. Psychophysical constituents or aggregates in both worlds are called the World of Formations.

In the general meaning of the word 'world' in the Asian sense means:

1. The planet Earth (the fifth largest planet in our solar system, the third planet from the sun, having a sidereal period of revolution about the sun of 265.26 days at a mean distance of 92.96 million miles or approx. 149 million kilometres, an axial rotation period of 23 hours 25.07 minutes, an equatorial

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<sup>3</sup> Bahujanahita Sutta or Loka Sutta It.78

radius of 3,963 miles or approx. 6,378 kilometres and a mass of 5.974 x 10<sup>24</sup> kilograms.) but also

2. A collective term for the human world, the heaven realms and the Brahma realms as a dwelling place for living beings and other forms of life. These realms together are spherical in shape.

In the meaning of the word 'world' in the Buddhist textbooks<sup>4</sup> has broad meaning. The narrow meaning even covers in three parts and each one has its own particular meaning.

1. **World of Formations [sa"nkhaara-loka]** meaning the bodies of humans and other life forms which are composed of the body and the mind/spirit.
2. **World of Beings [satta-loka]** meaning all living beings apart from ourselves -- for example, human beings and animals/ beasts, etc.
3. **World of Location [okaasa-loka]** which means the location in which the animal world lives. It is where people make a living and the place where one performs acts of karma, both good and bad. Thus the world on this level of description includes the Earth (on land), water, skies and the universe.

The meanings of the world found so far helps us know that the world is not merely the dwelling place for human beings and other life forms. But the world has a much deeper meanings which can be explained in three parts: the world of formations, world of location and world of beings. There is such broad meaning because the Lord Buddha surveyed the reality of the world with complete accuracy through his precise faculty of seeing and knowing. Nothing could be hidden from his knowledge.

From the world meaning as mentioned above, the reader will realize that the cosmology under examination in this course unit is primarily the 'world of location' and this includes the human realm in a metaphysical sense, which like the planet Earth in the astronomical sense is also a place of existence for human beings and a part of the universe as a whole. The components of this universe will be the subject matter of further chapters.

### 1.1.3 Defining 'This World' and the 'World to Come'

Further definitions that need to be understood are the terms '**this world**' and '**the next world**'. These terms are derived from Buddhist Scriptures [*tipi.taka*]. Belief in the existence of these two worlds are included amongst the ten items of Right View [*sammaa-di.t.thi*], which in turn is the first path factor of the Noble Eightfold Path [*a.t.tha"ngika-magga*] – where Right View refers to an accurate understanding about life and the world.

The term 'this world' refers to all three levels of description of the word 'world' whether it be the world of beings, or location or of formations. It can be concluded

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<sup>4</sup> Such as *Inside Understanding* Phrabhavanaviriyakhun (2004) (mss. as yet unpublished in English) p.45

that the world is simply a place where worldly beings dwell, including our mind and all the other animals. It refers to our present existence from now until the time of our death. This world is a world of differences. Everybody is differentiated by their physical body, wealth, status, intelligence and predisposition. Studying the Lord Buddha's teachings help us realize that the differences between us came from actions we have done ourselves in the past. The degree of our good and bad actions in the past affect our quality of life in 'this world'.

The term 'the world to come' has two meanings which are:

### **1. Life after Death**

This implies that once humans and other animals die, it is not the end of the story. Our physical existence comes to an end when our corpse is cremated or buried – however, the mind goes on for as long as there are still mental defilements remaining. The being will take a new birth and receive a new physical form – the details of which can not yet be predicted.

### **2. The Realms of Existence of Beings in Their Life after Death**

It is certain that once a being arises, it is necessary to have a substrate or a location where that being can exist. From our experience in this world, it is easy to imagine that if a person is born into a wealthy, famous family they will take on a location which is comfortable. On the other hand, if a person is born into a poor family, they would take on a location full of hardship.

Therefore, it can be concluded that it is hard to predict the exact form the world to come will take for any particular being -- but it is certain that we have to prepare ourselves for the world to come for as long as we still have defilements in our minds.

## **1.2 Beliefs Concerning This World and the Next**

People of different cultures have different beliefs depending on where they live and the religious teachings available to them. This causes different habits of thought, speech and action especially those concerning their beliefs about this world and the next. There are people who deny the existence of this world or the next. This kind of belief influences the way they think, speak and act. Such beliefs were in existence many thousands of years before the arising of the Lord Buddha. Even after the Lord Buddha arose in the world, doubts about the existence of this world and the next have been propagated by religious teachers down to the present day.

As a result of his enlightenment the Lord Buddha was able to see the nature of existence according to its reality. He could see how living beings were reborn according to their karma allowing him to know that denial of the existence of this world and the next world is erroneous – being one amongst the negative attitudes to the world known in Buddhism as False View [*micchaa-di.t.thi*].

It is therefore important to understand about the true nature of this world and the next, whether they exist or not and the disadvantages of denying their existence – and ultimately whether it is of any benefit to study cosmology at all, since it is intimately connected with the existence of this world and the next.

### 1.2.1 Evidence for the Existence of This World and the Next

Denial of the existence of this world is nothing new. It is a belief that has been around for a long time and continues to exist for as long as people have no access to the Buddha's teaching. The Lord Buddha taught us to believe in the existence of this world and the next – or, put another way, that death is not the end of the story. This also attests to the fact that good deeds and bad deeds do not end in this world, but are carried over to affect the perpetrator in the afterlife.

It is a guarantee that when we die, we must be reborn elsewhere for as long as our defilements are not completely extinguished. What form we take in the afterlife is another story. Evidence for the existence of this world and the next exist is as follows:

#### 1. The Logical Argument

If when we die, death is the end of the story, this implies that our present lifetime is our first because past lives cannot exist. All differences between people would have to come about either by 'nature' or by 'nurture'. If we really were born in this world for the first time, then those with the same 'nature' such as identical twins should be exactly the same in every way, whether it be their appearance or their personality, because they are genetically identical. However, even after birth, they are still not alike. If it were 'nurture' that accounted for the differences between people, brothers and sisters brought up by the same parents would behave the same – however this is obviously not the case. If one is to deny the existence of past lives it is difficult to explain such differences. However, if karma accumulated during past lives is taken into account the differences can easily be accounted for by the unequal amount of merit and demerit accumulated in the past by each individual. As mentioned in the Lord Buddha in conversation with Subha Todeyyaputta<sup>5</sup> that an individual's quality of life depends on their past karma:

*“All beings own their own karma, are heir to their karma,  
have karma as their origin, karma as their family,  
as their clan and abide in their karma.  
Karma dictates the coarse or refined quality of life of each being.”*

In summary, each individual is born different because of the karmic retribution of their own actions, speech and thought in the past. Therefore, when the identical twins are born in this world, their past karma is not the same even though they have the same mother and father. This logically supports the existence of this world and the next.

2. **Practical Argument:** if a person believes that death is the end of the story they will have no motivation to do good deeds because any good karma accrued thereby would disappear when one died. So thinking, if they fail to do any good deeds throughout their lives they will certainly live a life of hardship reaping the retribution of the bad deeds they have done in the place of good ones. If a person denies the existence of this world and the next, thinking that death is the end of the story, they will have no scruples about doing bad

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<sup>5</sup> Cula-kammavibhanga Sutta (M.iii.202ff)

deeds. Their life will be one of hardship. If it turned out that death was the end of the story one would merely 'break even' but if it turned out that there was an afterlife where retribution could return to us, the next world would be even more difficult than the present one. On the contrary, a person who believes in the existence of the afterlife will be motivated to do good deeds throughout their life. They will lead a happy life. If they die and find there is no afterlife, there is no harm done. However, if it does happen that there is an afterlife, then their next life will be filled with even more happiness.

Examination of this world and the next is presented here to provide a foundation to the following chapters. This is not to detract from beliefs the reader may already possess – but to encourage students to remain open-minded and give the description of the world and cosmology which follows, the benefit of the doubt.

### **1.2.2 Essential Things to Understand about This World**

It is essential to understand the following things about this world as follows:

1. *This world has an origin* means that beings in this world and the state they find themselves in, whether it be their appearance, financial status, intelligence or disposition all happen because of reasons – which means the karma they have done in the past.
2. *The uncertainty of this world* means the world changes all the time and nothing is permanent. For example, we are born strong and healthy but may become sick at a later date if we are not careful about our health in the present.
3. *This world is of benefit to us* refers especially to the world at the level of meaning of our bodies -- because the human body is particularly suitable for the cultivation of merits and many different kinds of good karma. Bodies of other animals, whether they have many feet or few or no feet at all, are not able to do good deeds easily like human beings can. If referring to the world at the level of meaning of our environment we see that the human realm is the only location that is appropriate for doing good deeds. It is here we can meet with good friends [*kalyaa.namitta*] including parents, teachers, friends and monks who can help to advise us how to do good deeds.
4. *This world has only limited time available* means that our time in this world is limited by our inevitable death. However, we cannot know the time of our death in advance. It depends on the good deeds or bad deeds that each person has done in their past and present lives.

### 1.2.3 Benefits of Having a Correct Understanding of This World

Keeping these four features of this world in mind will help us gain the wisdom to teach ourselves to selectively cultivate only good karma in the present as best we can, inspiring us to:

1. Do only good karma from this day forth because when our good fortune in this world, is dependent on the fruits of good karma cultivated in our past lives. The effects of the good karma in our past will one day run out, which is why we need to be quick to do more good deeds.
2. Strictly avoid doing bad karma at all out of awe for the countless harmful forms of retribution coming from bad karma which can affect us, our friends around the world and our natural surroundings.
3. Avoid just sit around and doing nothing or neglecting to cultivate any good karma at all. The act of doing nothing not only brings us no benefit but lets the merits that we have accumulated in the past run out, while the remaining time we have available to cultivate merit shortens every day.
4. Realize that we ought to use our physical body to the maximum benefit in cultivating good deeds. Whether our body be healthy or disabled, we should study the Law of Karma to the point of understanding and choose to do only good deeds. Even if our body is handicapped, we can still use it to do good deeds.

### 1.2.4 Preparing Correctly for the World to Come

Having recognized the benefits of this world, it is essential to prepare for the world to come. Preparing for life after death includes four practices as follows:

1. *Having faith in the working of the law of karma.* We must study the law of Karma and truly understand it because we must quit evil doing and do more good deeds.
2. *Keeping one's precepts strictly.* One should keep at least the Five Precepts. Better still one should try to keep the Eight Precepts from time to time or better still, for the rest of ones life. Besides increasing ones merit, keeping the precepts will purify one in body, speech and mind.
3. *Practising generosity to the full.* After we die, we cannot take our bodies or possessions with us, but we can take the merit with us which has resulted from doing generous deeds.
4. *Improve upon your wisdom more and more.* This can be done by meditating and stilling our minds to the point it is radiant and can see things according to their reality.

In summary, this is the knowledge of this world and the next exist as indicated in the Lord Buddha's teachings. We study cosmology here to better understand this world and the next and to gain Right View on these issues. Such understanding will allow us to choose a way of life that is beneficial during our short time as a human instead of having to waste time learning by trial and error.

### **1.3 Sources of Buddhist Cosmological Knowledge**

All human beings are ignorant when they come into the world – with more questions in their minds than answers. If we try to remember back to our experiences when we were first born, there is probably very little we can remember about how we thought or felt at that time. If we were to remember, we would find that we were filled with wonder for everything we saw, touched or heard from the first moments after our birth. Once we became able to speak, we'd start to ask our parents questions about everything new to us. Even as young adults, our curiosity about our surroundings hardly diminished. But this curiosity would perhaps be different in nature from our curiosity as a child and perhaps even now as adults do we keep some of our curiosity.

Of all the mysteries of existence, the issue of the world's creation is what people have paid the most attention to, both in philosophy and science. We treat the origin of our planet with such interest because we are reliant on our planet for our survival. We need to know as much as possible about our planet so that we can continue to live in this world in safety and happiness.

The remainder of this chapter shows how Buddhist methodology can be useful in answering questions about the world and universe -- a method different to that of science. The conclusions drawn by Buddhist methodology may have similarities as well as differences from the conclusions drawn by scientific methodology.

#### **1.3.1 Searching for Knowledge in Buddhism**

Buddhism has a name for being a religion that is based on reason. The Lord Buddha did not claim to have a monopoly on all the different knowledge that makes up Buddhism. If anyone spoke the truth, the Lord Buddha acknowledged it as such. The truth that we speak of here is referred to in Buddhism as 'Dhamma'. The Lord Buddha is not the inventor or owner of the Dhamma. The Dhamma is merely the nature of things in the life and the world. If anyone is able to reach Enlightenment, that person becomes able to discern the real nature of the things they see in the world around them. These observations, or Dhamma, were something the Lord Buddha chose to share with the people of the world so that they too could benefit from true knowledge about the nature of things. In just the same way, scientific laws existed in the world long before scientists discovered them. The dictionary of Buddhism<sup>6</sup> indicates that:

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<sup>6</sup> Paticcasamuppapaadakahaa of the Kathaavattu 81/18 verse 1086

“Whether the Lord Buddha exists or not, the Dhamma that still exists as universal law [*dhammaniyaama*]. Once the Buddha had seen those laws, he related them to others, set models, described principles and explained them in a way easy to understand saying ‘Look for yourselves!’”

In this context, Dhamma means the laws of nature -- the Dhamma that the Lord Buddha researched as being innumerable. It is because of the Lord Buddha’s special faculty for ‘seeing and knowing’ [*ñāa.nadassana*] which is so broad it penetrates the nature of all things that we refer to his knowledge as ‘all knowing’ [*sabbaññutañāa.na*]. However, the Lord Buddha did not teach the whole of Dhamma to the people of the world because some content does nothing to facilitate progress on the pathway to Enlightenment. The Lord Buddha shared only the items of Dhamma which would allow others to attain enlightenment (attaining which they would be able to see the nature of the remaining Dhammas for themselves). However, the *Dhammas* which the Lord Buddha taught mankind can be compared to a handful of leaves. The *Dhammas* that the Lord Buddha knew but chose not to teach can be compared with all the leaves in the forest as mentioned in Si.msapaa Sutta<sup>7</sup> that:

At one time, the Lord Buddha travelled to a Si.msapa forest. He picked up some Si.msapa leaves and then asked all the monks around him “Which is the more – the Si.msapa leaves that I hold in my hands or the leaves on all the Si.msapa trees in the forest?” The monks replied, “There are more Si.msapa leaves in the whole forest than in your hands.” The Lord Buddha explained “Similarly, the knowledge which I have not shared with you is more than that which I have taught. The knowledge that I have shared with you is a small proportion just like the leaves in my hands because the other types of knowledge do not serve their purpose. They do not help to reduce preoccupation with sensuality or to relieve suffering.”

### 1.3.2 Cosmology as Part of the Lord Buddha’s Knowledge

Cosmology is a part of the knowledge which the Lord Buddha discovered. And the Lord Buddha knew that all phenomena came about as a result of natural laws, which are called Universal Laws [*dhammaniyaama*]. The Lord Buddha gave more of a summary of the content of Universal laws, rather than a specific description. Afterwards, commentarians expanded the content further and more thoroughly. In these written texts, there were written five categories of natural laws:

1. **Physical Laws** [*utuniyaama*] are natural laws which cover the manifestation of all non-living things, for example, the occurrence of thunder and lightening. The arising and falling away of this world even follow these natural laws. Western Buddhist textbooks tend to say that the Ancient Indians had no idea what caused the patterns in Nature but Buddhism attributed these patterns to physical laws.

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<sup>7</sup> S.v.437



2. **Biological Laws** [*bijaniyaama*] are natural laws which are particular to animate objects like plants or animals. These natural laws dictate that when we plant a rice seed it grows into a rice plant. The offspring an elephant gives birth to must be a baby elephant. Buddhism attributes this predictability to biological laws.
3. **Psychological Laws** [*cittaniyaama*] are natural laws which deal with the mechanisms of how the mind works. Buddhism believes that people are made up of two main parts: namely body and mind. The mind is composed of the system which allows us to work, change and act in a way which is individual to each person. Buddhism attributes such dynamics to psychological laws.
4. **Karmic Laws** [*kammaniyaama*]: are laws concerning how karma gives its effects. Karma refers to intentional actions. The virtue of the intention behind the act divides karma into two types: good karma and bad karma. Good karma is reciprocated with positive fruits. Bad karma is reciprocated with negative retribution. This type of law is also referred to as the Law of Karma.
5. **Universal Laws** [*dhammaniyaama*]: are natural laws that deal with cause and effect where they concern the mental and physical phenomena. This law has the broadest definition and is an umbrella for all the four types of laws already mentioned.

The Lord Buddha discovered all five of these natural laws but did not teach all of them. He taught only Universal laws with a focus on Psychological and Karmic Laws. The Lord Buddha taught very little of Physical and Biological Law. On the contrary, science emphasizes the Physical and Biological Laws within Universal Law. Science has little or no interest in Karmic or Psychological Law. This is one point that distinguishes Buddhism from Science. Buddhism takes a broader overall perspective of life and the world than Science.

An important point to realize is that Universal laws encompass all the other four types of law. Even though it is true that Buddhism focuses on Karmic and Psychological Laws, it does not reject Physical or Biological Laws which are the focus of scientific endeavour. Therefore, Buddhism tends not to conflict with Science.

Once equipped with the dhammas allowing us to become enlightened, we will be able to know that there is even more material that the Lord Buddha discovered but did not share with us. The material that he did teach was only the part to relieve the immediate suffering which is a huge concern in all our lives.

### 1.3.3 Sources of Buddhist Cosmological Knowledge

Empirical testing, using equipment external to the body, which is the source of most scientific knowledge is correct only from certain perspectives. In cases where empirical studies give correct results, it is usually because the subject matter of the research is not so complicated and usually the research results are not altogether thorough. The efficacy of the research is limited because of the limitations of the research tools.

Another way to obtain knowledge and see things correctly is the study by mind, which does not have to rely on any tools. It needs only a mind sufficiently clear to gain internal vision. Having a still and stable mind gained by meditating in a proper way consistently is a starting point to discover the truth about life. Once successful, knowledge is gained from images appearing in mind or in Buddhist terminology, the faculty of 'seeing and knowing' [*ñānadassana*] or seeing through the power of mind.

Those of us belonging to the scientific age may have our reservations about the potential of the mind for discovering universal laws – thus we need first to explore how the mind functions. The original state of the mind is crystal clear. However, once the mind becomes engrained with defilements, the mind takes on an abnormal condition becoming clouded, distorted and scattered reducing the quality of the mind poorer and undermining its power. However, if the mind is cultivated to the point of stillness (bringing the faculties of perception, memory, thought and knowledge to a single point at the middle of the body our mind will regain its power. It is similar to the way scattered sunlight if focused by a lens creates a spot with enough heat to burn a hole. Our mind is very similar. Once the mind is concentrated in stillness on a single spot, our thought will go deeper instead of scattering; hence, the mind gains the power to do many amazing things.

To give another example – normally we consider the speed of light as the fastest possible speed in the universe. However, the speed of light is still slower than that of the mind. Supposing we have recently visited a country ten thousand miles away and we reminisce, our mind takes only a fraction of a second to be back in that country again. Our mind can travel not only in the present but can even leap to the past and the future. This is the miracle of mind.

Knowledge coming from the trained mind is not exclusive to Buddhism but in fact predates it. The hermits, ascetics and the spiritual leaders of ancient times focused their minds to access knowledge by visions seen in the mind, but the images they saw may have been fragmented or incomplete. They taught others of their knowledge revealing such things as the knowledge of heaven or the Brahma-world. They assumed the highest realms of existence they saw were the ultimate.

The Buddha arose in the world as a result of training himself over the course of innumerable lifetimes and consequently had a complete knowledge about the nature of things animate and inanimate in the world, the arising and decay of the world, cosmology and the origin of all things. He passed on this knowledge to others – a body of knowledge [*vijjā*] which is the highest level of knowledge in Buddhism. This supreme knowledge is known as the Threefold Knowledge [*tevijjā*] and consists of:

1. *Knowledge of one's own previous lifetimes* [*pubbenivaasanussatiñāa.nā*]. This is the ability to recollect the ones own past lives from one, two, ten, a hundred or a thousand lifetimes ago.
2. *Knowledge of the previous lifetimes of others* [*cutuupapaatañāa.nā*]. This is the ability to know how beings' karma affects their birth and death in the cycle of existence – giving them better or worse quality of life, whether it be refined or coarse complexions, wealth or poverty. Another name for this ability is the celestial eye [*dibbhacakkhu*].

### 3. *Knowledge of an end of all defilements [asavakkhayañaa.na].*

This Threefold Knowledge, especially the recollection of his own previous lifetimes, allowed the Buddha to know about the evolution of the Earth because he could recall his former existences from times during the arising and decay of the Earth. The fact that there were such eras for the Buddha to learn about proves that the Earth has not always been as it is now – and the same goes for the universe and everything else. By practicing the Buddhist doctrine, one day we too can reach the point of illumination where we can prove the nature of the earth and universe for ourselves.

#### 1.3.4 **Buddhist Cosmology Is Unfathomable by Conceptual Thought**

As previously mentioned, Buddhism is a religion based on reasoning. However, there are some issues that the Lord Buddha did not advocate people to speculate about rationally. Buddha designated such things unfathomable by conceptual thought. Although at first sight this might seem to be contradictory, in fact the Buddha realized the limitations of mundane understanding. It needs enough meditation to have insight into these matters as already mentioned in the account of the origin of Buddhist cosmological knowledge. The Buddha's explanation of issues unfathomable by conceptual thought appeared in Acintita Sutta<sup>8</sup> as follows:

1. *The powers of the Buddha [buddhavisaya] -- i.e., the range of powers a Buddha develops as a result of becoming a Buddha.*
2. *The powers developed through the absorptions [-naa.navisaya] -- i.e., the range of powers that one may obtain while they reach absorptions in meditation.*
3. *The outcome or the retribution of our actions -- i.e. the precise outcomes of karmic action.*
4. *Philosophical analysis of the nature of the world -- i.e. conjecture about (the origin, etc., of) the world.*

From this Sutta, we will see that speculating about (for example) who created the Earth, how it happened, or how the Earth will come to its end are unfathomable by conceptual thought so we should not become preoccupied with them or else one may be driven insane. It is a very long time span over which our Earth comes into existence, perpetuates and decays that it can only be calculated in terms of incalculable eons [asañkheyya kappa]. It is impossible to prove empirically. The more one conceptualizes about it the more confusing it becomes – until one can finally become insane.

What we should really become preoccupied with is how to break free from this world. We ought to use the arising and decay to arouse a sense of urgency in cultivating good deeds to escape the cycle of existence such as training our mind in meditation

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<sup>8</sup> A.ii.80

to prove the real nature of these questions after we have come to an end of all defilements.

### 1.3.5 The Purpose of Studying Cosmology

The initial stages of Buddhist teachings focuses on encouraging people to cultivate good deeds and adjusting themselves to break free from suffering. As a result of following such teachings they fulfil the true goal of their lives to become free from defilements, attain nirvana and break free from the cycle of existence. As our lifetime on this the world is short, we do not have the time to spare to remain ignorant about such things as cosmology.

Thus on subjects such as cosmology, the Buddha did not teach in detail but merely explained the parts necessary to be able to comprehend the arising, perpetuation and decay of worldly phenomena. Equipped with his teachings, people become wary of sensuality and inspired to meditate in accordance with an example given in the Buddhist scriptures:<sup>9</sup>

At the time, Malu"nkya became a monk in Buddhism. He wanted clear answers about whether the Earth be permanent or impermanent, about this world and the next. The monk Malu"nkya suspected that the Buddha *could* not answer ten certain questions including that of the permanence of the Earth and whether there will be an end to the world. He requested the Buddha to answer those questions saying that if the Lord Buddha knew the answer, he should leave no shadow of a doubt in Malu"nkya's mind. However, if the Lord Buddha did not know the answer, he should admit it. If the Lord Buddha did not answer anything, he would retire from monkhood.

The Lord Buddha asked him, "Did I ever persuade you to ordain to have these questions answered?" The monk Malu"nkya agreed he never had.

The Lord Buddha continued by saying that even if someone were to threaten to disrobe if not receiving answers to those questions that person would die before the Buddha agreed to answer them. It is like a man who got shot by a poison arrow. Even his relatives tried to take him to the doctor to heal him, he refused to allow the doctor to take the arrow out, until somebody told him who shot him, what was his name, whether the answer was tall or short, black or white, where he lived, what was the arrow made from and so forth. This man would die unnecessarily if he kept asking those useless questions. The urgent need for him was to cure his suffering, not to have his questions answered.

Finally, the Buddha concluded that he would only give the answer concerning issues that help bring people to the end of suffering, extract themselves from sensuality, be peaceful, happy, gain wisdom and knowledge and attain Nirvana.

This Sutta demonstrates that Buddha would not respond with useless knowledge. Some of the questions that the monk Malu"nkya asked, like those about this world

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<sup>9</sup> Cuu.lamalu"nkayovaada Sutta M.i.426ff.

and the next are unfathomable by conceptual thought. Such issues are further knowledge. Conceptual answers to such questions are no use in helping us to free ourselves from suffering. Instead we should focus ourselves on practice until we succeed – only in this way can we really learn more. Just as the man who got shot by the arrow would perish if he insisted on finding out who the archer was and so forth, as a practitioner our progress will be compromised if we waste time searching for useless answers.

Cosmology is amongst the issues unfathomable by conceptual thought. The Buddha taught the Cūḷavaṇṇasutta to warn people not to be reckless and to gain a sense of urgency by the impermanence of the world. He taught us to use the short space of our lives to perform the maximum of good deeds to reach the truths of life accessible only by meditation.

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# **CHAPTER 2**

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## **The Building Blocks of Life & the World**

## Chapter 2

### The Building Blocks of Life & the World

#### Units in this Chapter

##### 2.1 The Elements

- 2.1.1 Some Definitions
- 2.1.2 Categorization of the Elements
- 2.1.3 Characteristics and Qualities of the Elements

##### 2.2 Purpose of Elemental Study

- 2.2.1 Proportions of Elements Brings about Diversity
- 2.2.2 Elements Are Alterable
- 2.2.3 Beings Are Associated **According** to Elements
- 2.2.4 All Elements Are Subject to the Three Universal Characteristics

#### Chapter at a Glance

1. Animate and inanimate entities are at base made up of fine, primary constituents, called "elements" -- fundamental building blocks which cannot be further subdivided.
2. Elements are self-sustaining entities which exist naturally and nurture the continued existence of a whole.
3. The four elements earth, water, fire and wind -- are present in all animate and inanimate entities, while the six elements -- earth, water, fire, wind, space and consciousness -- are present only in living humans and animals. Plants don't have these additional elements although they are living beings, because plants lack consciousness.
4. Each element has its own attributes. Earth or the solid element has a special attribute that can solidify or soften material objects. Without this element, no objects can form into physical shapes. Water or the liquid element enables cohesion and fluidity of material objects. Fire or the heat element gives warmth or coolness to material objects. The wind or motion element enables movement of objects or makes them stationary. The space element is emptiness or vacuum -- the empty space where no earth, water, fire or wind are found -- the empty space which resides between other elements. The consciousness

element, when combined with the other five elements, creates life. Normally, this element is present in humans and animals -- and only when they are alive.

5. The study of elements enables us to learn that wholes -- whether animate or inanimate – are made-up of a combination or elemental parts. The diversity of things is thus the result of different combinations of elements. Nonetheless, all elements can change and become purified -- as for example in human beings whose elements can be purified by keeping the precepts and practicing meditation. In addition, we come to understand that all beings are associated with one another according to their elements. Animals tend to associate with those of similar kind – as do human beings. As elements are alterable and able to influence one another, we have to be aware that when we are spending a lot of time with a particular sort of person – we will be influenced by them. Thus, Buddhism teaches people to avoid fools and associate with the wise. Nevertheless, all elements are subject to the three Universal Conditions [*ti-lakkha.na*]. Entities arise, perpetuate and finally decay. Eventually, when time comes, elements making up an entity separate and return to their original forms. We should therefore not have any worldly attachment, but we should view things according to their reality and follow the teaching of Lord Buddha, which is the noble path leading to Nirvana obtaining release us from the cycle of existence.

## Chapter Objectives

This unit should give students the knowledge and understanding to able to:

1. Explain the basic constituents of a whole correctly.
2. Define the elements correctly.
3. Explain the difference in categorization of the four and the six elements correctly.
4. Explain the characteristics and qualities of each element.
5. Explain the purpose of elemental study.

## Introduction

In the previous chapter, defining cosmology, we learned that the Lord Buddha discovered facts about life and the world, as well as the nature of matter. Such discoveries allow us a better comprehension of phenomena, in terms of cause and effect, rather than blind faith or forced belief. Each person can prove Buddhist knowledge for themselves – and the Buddha passed down to us the methodology by which this can be achieved. Equipped with a basic grasp of cosmology, we continue with an introduction to the basic constituents of all entities, called ‘elements’ [*dhaatu*].



## 2.1 The Elements

The elements we are about to study in this chapter are unlike elements encountered in our high-school chemistry lessons as Mendeleev's Periodic Table – whether it be helium, argon or nitrogen. Here we refer to elements in a more 'alchemical' -- as the very primary constituents of all entities, meaning that every animate and inanimate entity is composed of these primary elements — fundamental *qualitative* units that cannot be further subdivided.

### 2.1.1 Some Definitions

The following are some definitions of elements as given by scholars:

- Elements are entities that which nurtures, exists, perpetuates.<sup>1</sup>
- Elements are entities that exist in nature, cannot be subdivided, are fundamental and root form.<sup>2</sup>
- Elements are matter that is the base composition of everything.<sup>3</sup>

From the definitions presented above, we may conclude:

Elements are the ultimate qualitative constituents of a whole, including both living and non-living entities, which can not be subdivided. They function to maintain the continuance of an entity's existence.

### 2.1.2 Categorization of the Elements

Elements can be categorized in two ways: into 'the Four Elements' and into 'the Six Elements.' The reason for dividing into two was explained as follows:<sup>4</sup>

'Where the elements . . . are categorized by four it is for the benefit of the practitioners. In this manner, they are intended to use as an aid to stilling the mind in meditation on the elements [*dhaatu kamma.t.thaana*]. Where the elements are categorized by six it is for the purpose of insightful analysis.'

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<sup>1</sup> P. Longsombun Pali-Thai Dictionary (Bangkok: Athorn Karn Pim) p.336

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.* p.366

<sup>3</sup> Pin Mutukant, Explanations for Buddhist Studies Vol. III, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Bangkok: Kamol Karn Pim 1965) p.101

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.* p.102

## The Four Elements<sup>5</sup>

The four elements are also referred to as the Primary Elements [*bhuutaruupa*] or the Great Essentials [*mahaa bhuutaruupa*]. They comprise earth, water, fire and wind. The earth or solid element [*pa.thavii-dhaatu*] is a foundation for other elements, for every material object needs the earth element in order to form into various physical shapes. The water or liquid element [*aapo-dhaatu*] causes cohesion and fluidity. The fire or heat element [*tejo-dhaatu*] has the quality to heat things up, cool them down and facilitate digestion. The final element of wind or motion element [*vaayo-dhaatu*] gives objects its strengthening or supporting characteristics, making them stationary or movable.

The four elements are the constituents of a whole -- be they humans, animals, plants, all physical objects both inside and outside this world -- in other words, everything that is present in the universe. All four elements are present in material objects. Objects which exhibit strong solidity are dominated by the earth element. Similarly, liquidity is due to a strong presence of the water element.

## The Six Elements<sup>6</sup>

The six elements comprise earth, water, fire, wind, space and consciousness. The first four are exactly the same as for the four elements. The space element [*aakasa-dhaatu*], means the space between the earth element and the water element that enables the wind element to reside and flow through. The wind element represents motion -- it is the element that can move from one place to another, while the space element represents emptiness. Indeed, the space element already exists *within* the four elements. However, it is not included in the four elements in order to avoid confusion with the wind element, since the space element may be too complicated to understand for the mundane mind. For this reason, the space element is included instead, in the six elements which are normally taught to practitioners of meditation. The consciousness element [*vi~n~naa.na-dhaatu*] is an element seen only in living beings – something to be discussed in detail later.

Having learned the similarities and differences between the two ways of categorizing elements, we can conclude that the four elements can be applied to all entities – animate and inanimate alike, but the six elements can be applied only to living beings. The term ‘living beings’ here refers only to human beings and animals, but does not include plants. In spite of plants being alive with the ability to grow and change, they have no consciousness element. Consequently, plants do not have feelings or awareness. They are biological matter with no resident mind -- unlike humans and animals. What follows is now an examination of each element in detail.

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<sup>5</sup> as found at Catassa Sutta S.ii.169

<sup>6</sup> as found at Dhaatuvibha”nga, Suttantabhaajaniya 77/200

### 2.1.3 Characteristics and Qualities of Elements

Since the first four of the Six Elements are the same as the four elements, the characteristics of each element are applicable to both forms of categorization.

#### 1. *The Earth Element:*

By earth we do not mean soil, sand or clay as found in the fields or your backyard. Earth element here means the *quality* of solidity which may be characteristic to any material. Objects that are composed predominantly of the earth element or have proportionately more of the earth element than other elements, will exhibit solidity -- for example, metal, stone and wood are hard and rigid because earth is their main constituent. On the contrary, any objects that are composed of comparatively little earth element will be soft and yielding. Therefore, the rigidity of any object is dependent on the proportion of earth element in that object and it's the earth element alone that determines the rigidity or pliability of objects. The earth element is existent both inside and outside our body. In our body, the earth element is present in all external and internal organs that are solid or form a recognizable entity -- including hair of the head, bodily hair, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bones, bone-marrow, the spleen, the heart, the liver, connective tissue, kidneys, lungs, the large intestine, the small intestine, food and excrement. Outside our body, the earth element is contained in everything which exhibits solidity -- that is all physical objects whether it be houses, cars, ships or household appliances. Without the earth element, compounds of the element would not be able to remain intact -- just as terrestrial beings need dry land in order survive. The earth element can be compared to a glass and other elements to water. Water by its nature cannot maintain its shape unless it is poured into a receptacle -- where it will take on the shape of that container. Water that can take various shapes and maintain them therefore depends on glass to do so. Similarly, we can only distinguish things as entities in the world around us, because the earth element binds them into discernable shapes.

#### 2. *The Water Element:*

The water element doesn't specifically mean H<sub>2</sub>O -- as in fresh water, sea water, brackish water or well water. The water element refers to the quality of being fluid or cohesive and has the potential to add fluidity or cohesion to physical objects. If the water element is predominant in anything, it makes that thing fluid -- enabling it to flow. However, if the water element is comparatively scarce it will cause cohesion among objects just like sticky oil or adhesive that joins things together. In any object that has more water element than earth element, the strength of water element will weaken the qualities of earth element, causing the object to liquefy and become fluid. Water can flow because it is composed primarily of water element but has little of the earth element. Solid substances can liquefy and flow by the power of water element whenever the

earth element becomes less. However, if the water element is less than the earth element, the qualities of water element will enable the particles of earth element to adhere to one another, assembling them into a single unit just the same as moisture allows powder to cling together. The water element is also existent both inside and outside living beings. The water element inside refers to parts of the body that pervade, ooze, permeate, percolate and flow – whether it be bile, phlegm, lymph fluid, blood, sweat, fat, tears, shreds of fatty tissue, saliva, snot, marrow or urine. The water element outside is anything outside our body that pervades, sticks and holds -- including flavors in fruit and vegetables, milk, yogurt, butter, butter oil and moisture in the soil or the atmosphere.

### **3. The Fire Element:**

The fire element is characterized by the qualities of heat [*u.nha-tejo*] or coldness [*siita-tejo*]. The nature of the fire element is to emanate heat or coldness. The fire element exists both inside and outside our body. The fire element inside is the element that gives warmth to our body, makes our body degenerate, causes irritation and helps digest food. The fire element outside is heat and warmth that come from, for instance, fire, combustion, thunderbolts, solar heat and warmth inside materials like bonfires or glowing embers. There are five types of fire element in the body:

1. body warmth [*usmaa-tejo*]
2. feverish heat [*santappana-tejo*]
3. extreme body heat [*dahana-tejo*]
4. the heat of aging [*jira.na-tejo*]
5. digestive heat [*paacaka-tejo*]

Among five fire elements, it is only body warmth and digestive heat that always function in living beings. Extreme body heat, feverish heat and the heat of aging are generally absent. Only when body heat becomes abnormal -- for example when feverish -- does it transform into feverish heat, the stronger fire element. If the fever worsens making the patient delirious, it means the feverish heat has turned into extreme heat. For those who regularly experience illness or enter their old age, it signifies that the heat of aging has ousted the normal body heat. The heat of aging by its nature causes physical deterioration to our body including gray hair, loose teeth, cataracts and wrinkles.

### **4. The Wind Element:**

The wind element is characterized by the qualities of movement and compression. The compressing attribute of wind [*vitthambhana vaayo*] causes objects to become stable and motionless. If present in the body it causes strain, stiffness and aches in our body -- for example, when our muscles contract from an extensive exercise or when we get eye strain from extended staring. These actions trigger compression to occur. Outside our body, it's because of these

characteristics as well which allows the stability of all material objects or causes them compression -- for example, a balloon can become taut after it's inflated because of the wind element. Another aspect of the wind element is its motion [*samiira.na vaayo*]. This quality enables living beings to move around. The living beings' abilities to, for instance, move around, blink and roll their eyes, move their body parts, defecate and deliver babies are all attributable to this elemental quality. Outside the body this quality allows the movement of material objects. The wind element resides both inside and outside our body. Wind element in our body appears in the form of substances that flow inside the body -- such as burping, breaking wind, wind in the stomach, wind in the intestines or other organs, exhalation, inhalation and any other movement or flow inside the body. Wind element outside the body refer to all motion and stillness of material objects -- for example, the wind blowing, polluted air, clear air, hot or cool breezes.

### **5. The Space Element:**

The space element is the empty space or vacuum where earth, water, fire or wind elements are not present. It is the empty spaces between elements. The space element exists both inside and outside our body. The internal space element is the empty spaces and canals in and around our bodily organs -- for example, nostrils, nasal cavity, buccal cavity and throat. The space element outside the body is found wherever the preceding four elements are absent.

### **6. The Element of Consciousness:**

The consciousness element, when it appears in conjunction with the other five elements, animates them. Normally, only humans and animals have the consciousness element and it stays with them only as long as they are alive. Corpses and carcasses are inanimate because the consciousness element has already vacated them, leaving only the other five elements. The consciousness element makes us a sentient being – allowing us to be aware and realize what is happening, whether it is happiness, suffering or neither. In addition, emotions and thoughts are also the result of the consciousness element. The consciousness element can be divided into six kinds:

1. Eye-consciousness element [*cakkhu-vi~n~naa.na-dhaatu*]
2. Ear-consciousness element [*sota-vi~n~naa.na-dhaatu*]
3. Nose-consciousness element [*ghaana-vi~n~naa.na-dhaatu*]
4. Tongue-consciousness element [*jivhaa-vi~n~naa.na-dhaatu*]
5. Body-consciousness [*kaaya-vi~n~naa.na-dhaatu*]
6. Mind-consciousness-element [*mano-vi~n~naa.na-dhaatu*]

The perception of things around us is done by the consciousness element through our eyes, ears, nose, tongue and body – a process more easily understood by practicing meditation.

## 2.2 Purpose of Elemental Study

Elemental study permits better understanding of the material world — animate and inanimate, inside and outside our bodies — understanding that in fact every entity can be broken down into elements. Various compounds of elements create a variety of objects and life forms which will last as long as these elements are still able to hold together. After a certain time, compounds of the elements will break down, putting an end to the entity the elements have made up.

Thus we should not have any worldly attachment -- no matter what an object is or how remarkable -- because nothing is everlasting. Even the most delightful possessions have a limited lifespan, at the end of which they will decay and break down into the basic four elements. Worldly attachment brings about suffering and sorrow. It is the cause of conflict, struggle, persecution and exploitation among people, creating an endless cycle of suffering and pain.

Much of the turmoil we see in the world today comes from peoples' ignorance of the elemental nature of material things – that nothing is permanent — everything arises, lasts for a while and finally decays. Being unaware of this impermanent nature of material objects makes people possessive. Their ignorance leads to selfishness, to exploitation in society and, sadly, to violence and wars which ironically destroy the very things they are so attached to.

If people were to learn the elemental nature of material things and the impermanence of nature, they would come to realize that attachment to the things of the world is futile. All of us are mortals. No one can escape death. Even the greatest emperors or wealthiest billionaires have to breathe their last, leaving the world and all of their possessions behind. Understanding such things, people will not look down on others or take advantage of one another. There will be no rat-race and no abuse of the system. People will share what they have and extend a helping hand to others, because they know everyone is having to deal with the same suffering as themselves.

Above all, the knowledge allows us to see that this world is full of suffering. Suffering of many types is inevitable as long as we are still subject to the cycle of existence. In this world full of suffering, there is nothing permanent we can depend on. Therefore, we should forego the worldly attachment and seek a path to escape from the cycle of existence by cultivating merit and wholesomeness, purifying ourselves until all defilements are uprooted from our mind and finally escaping rebirth completely.

Because the elements are unstable, especially in living beings. It makes the characteristics and qualities of elements changeable. A living being with impure elements will have poor attributes. But if the elements in a living being are very pure, that being will have excellent attributes. Therefore altering the elements inside us is equal to bringing about changes to ourselves – a topic to be discussed later.

### **2.2.1 Proportions of Elements Brings About Diversity**

Although humans and animals are made up of only six elements including the consciousness element (lower forms of life have only five elements), the degree of diversity among humans and animals is remarkable.

The differences are accounted for both by the different proportions of the six elements and the purity of the elements too – to give an example, diamonds and rock are obviously different in terms of quality and appearance because their constituent elements do not have the same proportions and purity.

Even the differences between people – despite being born in the same country or family can be accounted for by differences in the purity of elements from person to person – just as a statue made of cement may be resilient or weak depending on whether or not the constituents of the cement are sifted before mixing.

The purity of elements of a person is determined by each individual's moral integrity. The higher the morality, the purer the elements one will have. Normally, the elements constituting humans and animals are contaminated by greed [*lobha*], hatred [*dosa*] and delusion [*moha*]. A person with high morality will have pure elements because their integrity helps eradicate greed, anger and delusion.

The purity of elements exhibits in various ways -- for instance, by wit and intelligence, good health, beautiful appearance and good complexion. Pure elements also influence the way a person to think, speak and act in a morally correct way. On the contrary, impure elements are the cause of lack of intelligence, bad health and physical ugliness. It influences a person to think, speak and act immorally, bringing himself and other people into hardship.

In other words, each human or each animal is individualized by levels of greed, hatred and delusion in their elements. Nevertheless, the elements inside us can be improved by developing moral integrity -- such as, keeping the precepts and practicing meditation habitually to purify them. In addition, formerly pure elements can become tainted if one compromises moral integrity.

### **2.2.2 Elements are Alterable**

Diversity in beings can be accounted for by their different degrees of purity. To give an example, supposing an ordinary man like us has a secure job and is able to earn his living with no hardship. If he is smart and a fast-learner, this is because the elements inside him are relatively pure. However, if he becomes preoccupied with greed, hatred and delusion, his intelligence and competence would undoubtedly be degraded.

We can even see how elemental purity affects our own performance. When we are angry, we cannot think clearly. Even though we are normally smart, as soon as we lose our temper, we can't find efficient solutions to our problems. Negative impulses

such as getting aggressive, dominate our mind. When we drink alcohol, we become a staggering idiot spouting incoherent nonsense and lacking control.

On the contrary, if our elements become purer, our performance will improve accordingly. An easy example is that with adequate rest, we will become healthy. Our mind will become refreshed and cheerful. We will notice that everything seems to go smoothly for us. If the elements inside us become purer still, so will our performance. The crystalline form of the relics found amongst the cremated ashes of monks renowned for purity attained in meditation or arahants only serve to confirm that the elements -- especially the ones inside human beings -- can be altered and purified.

When those arahants or meditation masters were alive, physically they looked like everyone else. However after they passed away and their bodies were cremated, their remains were transformed into gem-like relics which were transparent and shining. By contrast the ashes of unenlightened people are grey and sooty. This is because those of attainment had purified the elements inside them from greed, hatred and delusion.

The elements can be purified through keeping the Precepts and practicing meditation. Precepts can be observed on several levels of strictness – whether it be Precepts for the household life or precepts for the monastic life. Also, the effect of precepts varies according to the *number* kept and the *strictness* with which they are kept. Meditation practice also yields varying results according to the degree of the practitioner's attainment. The effect of precepts and meditation on one's elements is, thus, dependent on how well one keeps the Precepts and one's attainment in meditation practice.

Buddhist monks and novices who devote themselves to meditation and keeping the Precepts may attain supernormal powers. In the Buddhist scriptures [*tipi.taka*] there are countless accounts of monks and novices during the time of the Buddha who had become endowed with such powers as the divine eye or the divine ear. Some could fly. Some could remember their former existences. These abilities were the result of the purification of their elements. If the elements are purified to the point that all defilements are eradicated, a person then becomes an arahant being released from the cycle of existence. However, even the arahants' powers differed from one to the next because of the differences in the purity of their elements.

Thus, to purify our own elements, we need to the keep Precepts and practice meditation to the full. If we strive to the point that our elements become pure, we will be able to break free of the cycle of existence — with no more rebirth for us -- no more suffering or pain.

### **2.2.3 Beings are Associated According to Elements**

Not only do individuals differ according to their elements – it even affects the way they associate. Things tend to combine if they have the same attributes, but separate if their attributes differ -- for example, if we pour a glass of water into another glass of



water, the water then combines inseparably -- just as the streams running into a river, the sea and the ocean cannot be separated.

By contrast, entities that have different attributes do not combine -- water and oil, being a good example. They never combine no matter how hard we try. This is because water and oil are different in their attributes.

This is true not only of material objects, but also living beings. Animals tend to associate with their own kind, as in the words of the proverb, "Birds of a feather flock together." People tend to associate with people who have the same or similar elements allowing them to get along or share attitudes. In this respect, the Lord Buddha taught:<sup>7</sup>

"O! Monks! Beings with similar elements tend to flock together. Those with False View tend to associate with those of False View. Those with False Intention tend to associate with those of False Intention. Those with False Speech tend to associate with those of False Speech. Those with False Action tend to associate with those of False Action. Those with False Livelihood tend to associate with those of False Livelihood. Those with False Effort tend to associate with those of False Effort. Those with False Mindfulness tend to associate with those of False Mindfulness. Those with False Concentration tend to associate with those of False Concentration."

"Those with Right View tend to associate with those of Right View. Those with Right Intention tend to associate with those of Right Intention. Those with Right Speech tend to associate with those of Right Speech. Those with Right Action tend to associate with those of Right Action. Those with Right Livelihood tend to associate with those of Right Livelihood. Those with Right Effort tend to associate with those of Right Effort. Those with Right Mindfulness tend to associate with those of Right Mindfulness. Those with Right Concentration tend to associate with those of Right Concentration."

The Buddha's observation shows the trends of society where people tend to gravitate towards those who are like-minded. Government officials tend to associate with other government officials. Drug addicts or a gamblers will also tend to associate with the same type of people, because their similar internal elements draw them together. Thus, it can be said that so far as elements are concerned, *like attracts like* – and has the same dynamics as those already mentioned for purifying or altering elements.

#### **2.2.4 All Elements are Subject to the Three Universal Conditions**

Because the nature of elements is to change, the Buddha taught us to use our wisdom to see the elements as they really are. Even though things that are in our possession or even our body may *seem* to belong to us, in fact they do not -- they are not ours, not us and not 'of ourselves'. With this Right view, we will come to abandon passion

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<sup>7</sup> A.t.tha"ngkika Sutta S.ii.168

for elements (which constitute material objects) and finally abandon worldly attachments.

Being ignorant of the nature of elements, causes attachments for the elements and with them the ups and downs of elation or disappointment. Because of such attachment, beings cannot release themselves from the cycle of existence:<sup>8</sup>

“O! Monks! For as long as these beings are ignorant of the truth — the pleasure and the peril of the four elements, and the path unbounded by the four elements — those beings are still bounded, attached, imprisoned in this world -- as well as the world of angels [*deva*], the world of demons [*maara*], and the world of Brahma -- will not able to break free from the animal realm, as well as the realms of the Brahmas, angels and human beings. Their mind is unable to overcome defilements and the cycle of existence.

If these beings are enlightened as to the truth — the pleasure and the peril of the four elements, and the path unbounded by the four elements — those beings will break free, become detached, be released from this world -- as well as the world of the angels, the world of demons, the world of Brahma and even that of the animals — as well as Brahmas, angels and human beings. Their mind becomes free of defilements and breaks free of the cycle of existence.”

The Lord Buddha also taught that elements are the source of illness and cause aging to become manifest:<sup>9</sup>

“O! Monks! the arising, birth, perpetuation and manifestation of the earth element... are the arising, birth, perpetuation and manifestation of aging and death. The arising, birth, perpetuation and manifestation of the water element... of the fire element... of the wind element are the origin of suffering, the origin of illness, the manifesting of aging and death.

O! Monks! the extinguishing, stillness and ending of the earth element... are the demise of suffering, cessation of illness and extinction of aging and death. The extinguishing, stillness and ending of the water element... of the fire element... of the wind element... are the demise of suffering, cessation of illness and extinction of aging and death.”

In addition, he indicated that, to be released from suffering, one must abandon passion for the elements (which constitute material objects) thus bring about enjoyment:<sup>10</sup>

“O! Monks! one who has a passion for the earth element... is verily one who has passion for suffering. For one who has passion for suffering, I say he is not

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<sup>8</sup> Noceda Sutta S.ii.172

<sup>9</sup> Uppada Sutta S.iii.31

<sup>10</sup> Abhinandana Sutta S.iii.31

released from suffering. One who has passion for the water element... one who has passion for the fire element... one who has passion for the wind element... he is verily one who has passion for suffering. For one who has passion for suffering, I say he is not released from suffering.

O! Monks! one who abandons a passion for the earth element... he is verily one who abandons passion for suffering. For one who abandons passion for suffering, I say he is released from suffering. One who abandons passion for the water element... one who abandons passion for the fire element... one who abandons passion for the wind element... he is verily one who abandons passion for suffering. For one who abandons passion for suffering, I say he is released from suffering.”

## **Conclusion**

All beings are made up of elements, having elements as their fundamental building blocks. Humans and animals are composed of six elements, while plants are composed of five. Thus, no living thing is everlasting. They deteriorate as time goes by -- and finally as their time comes, their elements break up. We should not therefore have any worldly attachment, for the attachment brings forth suffering, disappointment, sorrow and sometimes trouble. We should view things according to their true nature. Such a view enables us to continue our life happily and paves the way for pursuing the noble path which leads to Nirvana and ultimately release from the cycle of existence.

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# **CHAPTER 3**

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## **Structure of the Universe**

## Chapter 3

### Structure of the Universe

#### Units in This Chapter

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##### 3.1.1 Infinite Universes

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2. The Heaven of the Thirty-Three [Taavat.imsa]

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4. The Heaven of the Satisfied Gods [Tusita]

5. The Heaven of the Gods Who Rejoice in Their Own Creations [Nimmaanaratii]

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  - 1.3.9 Sunakha Purgatory
  - 1.3.10 Yantapaasaa.na Purgatory
- 1.4 Lokanta Hell
- 2. Hungry Ghost [Pittivisaya] Realm
- 3. Monster [Asuurakaaya] Realm
- 4. The Animal [Tiracchaana] Realm
- 3.6.3 The Six Heaven Realms

### 3.7 Form Plane

### 3.8 Formless Plane

## Chapter at a Glance

1. According to the Lord Buddha, there are incalculable numbers of cosmoses which can be divided into three groups; small (containing one thousand universes), medium (containing one million universes), large (containing a billion universes). The structure of each universe is identical consisting of a sun, a moon, Mount Sumeru, four continents in the compass directions, four cosmic oceans, six realms of heaven, the Form Brahma realms, the Formless Brahma realms and the unfortunate realms. Vertically above Mount Sumeru the six realms of heaven are located starting from the heaven of the Four Great Kings, The Heaven of the Thirty-Three, the Heaven of the Yaamaa Gods, the Heaven of the Satisfied Gods, the Heaven of the Gods who rejoice in their own creations and the Heaven of the Gods who Lord over the creation of others, above which are Form- and Formless-Brahma Realms.

2. Planes [*bhava*] means world of beings. The Triple World includes the Sensual Plane, Form Plane and Formless Plane. Realms [*bhuumi*] means land or ground with a total of thirty-one different levels in one universe.
- The word '*bhumi*' can also mean 'spheres' or 'states' of mind – subdivided into four levels, namely: the sense-sphere [*kaamavacara-bhumi*], the form-sphere [*ruupavacara-bhumi*], the formless-sphere [*aruupavacara-bhumi*] and the transcendental sphere.
  - There are eleven realms in the Sensual Plane including the human realm, four hell realms and six heaven realms as follows:
    - The world of human beings [*manussa loka*] is shared with those of all three planes of the same universe
    - The unfortunate realms [*apayabhumi*] including the Hell Realms, the Realm of the Hungry Ghosts, the Realm of Monsters and the Realm of Animals.
      - The hell realms [*niraya bhumi*] are divided into three major areas; Major Hells, Satellite [*ussada*] Hells and Purgatory.
      - The monster realm is divided into three types; angelic monsters, hungry ghost monsters and hell-bound monsters.
      - The realm of animals [*tiraacchanayoni*] includes such creatures as dogs, cats, rats, chickens, ducks, snakes and fish.
    - The Heaven Realms have six different levels.
  - The Form Plane or Brahma world is inhabited by Brahmas and comprises sixteen levels. The Formless Plane or Formless Brahma world is divided into four levels.

## Chapter Objectives

This unit should give students the knowledge and understanding to able to:

1. Explain the physical structure and components of the universe.
2. Explain various types of plane and realm inhabited by various kinds of beings in the universe.

In the previous chapter, we learned that everything in the world and the universe on the microscopic level is composed of elements. Inanimate matter in this world consists of the four elements, whereas for living beings, an additional consciousness-element [*viññāna-dhaatu*] allows them to think and feel.

In this chapter, we will discuss the macroscopic structure of the universe as it has existed over an innumerable period of time down to the present day.

We will first compare and contrast the modern scientific view of the cosmos with that of Buddhism. However, no matter how far science advances, its discoveries will always fall within the scope of the Buddhist descriptions of nature, especially the nature of the world as impermanent. Things in the world arise, perpetuate and eventually decay. We should thus accrue goodness to the full in order to escape from the cycle of existence for our ultimate liberation.

### 3.1 Scientific Cosmology

Scientific discovery explains the origin of earth differently from many religions which this world was created by a creator god. Scientists, however, point out that the world is not the center of the universe. Rather, it is just a planet revolving around the sun. Even the sun that is the center of the solar system is still one of hundreds of stars belonging to the galaxy of the Milky Way. There are approximately one hundred of thousand million galaxies in our universe.

Astronomers divide the scientifically detectable stars into constellations. They conclude that the universe has a spiral shape consisting of many stars with a luminous hub illuminating vast stretches of space. Our world is only a small part of it.

#### 3.1.1 Countless Numbers of Universes

Before moving into the structure of the universe in Buddhist cosmology, we need to understand that this world, though seeming to be boundless and consisting of innumerable things, is indeed only a small point in even this immense universe. If we combine all the universes together, we will see find that even cosmoses vary in size: large and small, depending on how many universes exist in each.

The Lord Buddha discovered the existence of not one, but *countless* universes more than 2,500 years ago. In the Buddhist scriptures the word used to refer to the universe is '*lokadhaatu*'. The Buddha's discovery of 2,500 years ago conforms to scientific discoveries made only in the last few decades. It is therefore amazing how the Lord Buddha could discover such facts so accurately 2,500 years ago scientific knowledge had not yet been discovered. The Lord Buddha's observation about the universe are recorded as follows:<sup>1</sup>

Once Aananda Thera asked the Lord Buddha about the venerable Abhibhuu Thera, a disciple of Sikhii Buddha, who possessed the kind of voice that could be heard across 1,000 universes, if emanating from the Brahma realm. Aananda asked how far the Lord Buddha's voice could be heard. The Lord Buddha said it

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<sup>1</sup> Cu.Ianii Sutta A.i.226



could be heard as far as he wanted. Then the Lord Buddha told him about different sizes of the cosmoses: a small cosmos comprised 1,000 universes [*sahassiicuu.lanika-lokadhaata*]; a medium-sized one with 1 million universes [*dvisahassiimajjhimikaa-lokadhaata*]; and a large cosmos comprising of a billion universes [*tisahassiimahassii-lokadhaata*]. The voice of the Lord Buddha could be heard across the whole of a large cosmos.

From this sutta, we have learned about the virtually limitless extent of the cosmos. The Lord Buddha also categorized the universe in detail, in the way that cannot be done by scientific instruments or conventional human perceptions. Only those whose mind has been cultivated to the same degree as the Lord Buddha can see the immensity of space clearly. The Lord Buddha thus divided cosmoses into three types:

1. Small cosmoses: consisting of one thousand universes
2. Medium-sized cosmoses: consisting of one million universes
3. Large cosmoses: consisting of one billion universes

We also understand that human beings and other forms of life are not only residing in our world or our universe but also in other universes as well.

### 3.2 Buddhist Cosmology

Now realizing the immensity of the cosmos, we will now move on to study the structure of the Buddhist universe. The physical layout and components of every universe is the same. According to scriptures:<sup>2</sup>

“Aananda! The entire universe system is as immense as the length of a moonbeam or a sunbeam. Each universe, is endowed with 1,000 moons, suns, Mount Sumeru, a Rose Apple Continent [*Jambuudiipa*], a Western Continent [*Aparagoyaanadiipa*], a Northern Continent [*Uttarakurudiipa*], an Eastern Continent [*Pubbevidehadiipa*], 1,000 oceans, six realms of heaven and 1,000 realms of Brahma”.

It is apparent how vast the universe is, though it is incalculable. It extends as far as a moonbeam or a sunbeam. If we are able to measure how far a beam of light from the sun or the moon could extend, which might be very hard to accomplish, we would be able to know the size of the universe.

Furthermore, each universe shares identical physical components comprising a Sun, a Moon, Mount Sumeru, four continents: the Rose Apple Continent [*Jambuudiipa*], the Western Continent [*Aparagoyaanadiipa*], the Northern Continent [*Uttarakurudiipa*], the

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<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*

Eastern Continent [Pubbevidehadiipa], four cosmic oceans, six realms of heaven and the Brahma world. Even though the Cuulanii Sutta did not mention the formless-planes and hell realms, they are included in the universe according to the Buddhist Scriptures. (see facing page for overview of universe structure).

### 3.3 Physical Layout of the Universe

As each universe has an identical structure and what follows in brief will be an examination of the common components to allow the reader to realize the constituents and relationship between them.

#### 3.3.1 Around Mount Sumeru

At the center of each universe is Mount Sumeru. Mount Sumeru is surrounded by seven mountain ranges, each like concentric tiers radiating concentrically around Mount Sumeru. Each tier is separated by water. There is also a cosmic ocean beyond the last mountain range. Within this cosmic ocean are four major continents located at the four points of the compass around Mount Sumeru. The sun and the moon revolving around Mount Sumeru at an altitude midway between sea level and the summit of Mount Sumeru.

#### 1. The Four Continents

The four continents<sup>3</sup> in which human realms are located are as follows:

- 1.1 **The Eastern Continent [Pubbevidehadiipa]** is located to the east of Mount Sumeru and is lit by gray light.
- 1.2 **The Western Continent [Aparagoyaanadiipa]** is located to the west, covered with crystal and is lit by clear light.
- 1.3 **The Northern Continent [Uttarakurudiipa]** is located to the north, covered with gold and is lit by golden light.
- 1.4 **The Rose Apple Continent [Jambuudiipa]** is located to the south, covered with emerald and is consequently lit by green light.

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<sup>3</sup> SnA.ii.443, A.i.227, A.v.59

### 3.3.2 Above Mount Sumeru

Having learned about the physical layout of Mount Sumeru, we will now move on to vertical structure of Mount Sumeru above which are the fortunate realms of existence:

#### 1. The Heaven of the Four Great Kings [Caatumahaaraajika]

This is the first level of heaven and is located from the shoulder to the foot of the mountain. It is the home of several types of deity including earth sprites, tree sprites and air sprites. Some types of deities reside on the Rose Apple Continent amongst the human beings. Those living on other planets are called air sprites.

#### 2. The Heaven of the Thirty-Three [Taavat.imsa]

This is the second level of heaven and is located on the summit of Mount Sumeru, about half way up the Plane of Sense-Pleasure.

#### 3. The Heaven of the Yaamaa Gods [Yaamaa]

This is third level of heaven is located in mid-air above the Heaven of the Thirty-Three.

#### 4. The Heaven of the Satisfied Gods [Tusita]

This is the fourth level of heaven and is located above the heaven of the Yaamaa Gods is and larger than it.

#### 5. The Heaven of the Gods Who Rejoice in Their Own Creations [Nimmaanaratii]

This is the fifth level of heaven and is located above the Heaven of the Satisfied Gods and is still larger than it.

#### 6. The Heaven of the Gods Who Lord over the Creation of Others [Paranimmitavasavattii]

This is the sixth level of heaven and is located above the Heaven of the Gods who rejoice in their own creations and larger than it still.

The Form- and Formless-Brahma realms are located above the Heaven of the Gods who lord over the creation of others and are larger the higher they go.

### 3.3.3 Below Mount Sumeru

The unfortunate realms are situated beneath Mountain Sumeru.

Mount Sumeru rests upon the peaks of three smaller mountains. Between these smaller mountains, there are valleys which are the realm of the Titans [*asuura*] or drunken angels who were banished from heaven). Between each mountain beneath the realm of Titans is the realm of the hungry ghosts [*peta*] and monsters [*asuurakaaya*].

Beneath the realm of the monsters are the hell realms, with the first level of hell at the top and the eighth level of hell (the largest) at the bottom. There are also smaller satellite [ussada] hells and Purgatory [yamaloka] radiating concentrically from each main level of hell.

### 3.4 The World of Beings

When we look out into the immensity of the universe, we cannot help but wonder whether there is life out there. But, in fact this is because most realms of existence cannot be seen by the naked eye except for the human and animal realms. Therefore, we only see a boundless space but not all the heaven realms or their innumerable inhabitants.

#### 3.4.1 Distinction Between Realms and Planes of Existence

There are two terms that are often confused: Planes [*bhava*] and realms of existence [*bhumi*]. Thus we need to clarify the distinction before going further:

**Planes [*bhava*]** means the world of beings or living condition of beings:

1. **The plane of sense-pleasure** is the place inhabited by those who indulge in sensual pleasure.
2. **The form-plane** is the place inhabited by Form Brahmas [*ruupa-brahma*].
3. **The formless-plane** is the place inhabited by Formless Brahmas [*aruupa-brahma*].

**Realms of existence [*bhumi*]** means ground, land, or domain which in our context is subdivided thirty-one realms of existence (*to be discussed later*)

‘**Planes**’ and ‘**realms**’ share similarities of meaning. The number of categorization is not the same. Realms can be subdivided more than planes. However, only planes can be subdivided into three (sensual-, form- and formless-planes) which are collectively referred to as the ‘Triple World’ [*ti-bhava*]. Generally, we often use these two words together.

What follows is an examination of each plane of existence in brief for us to understand about lives in the three planes. We can examine each plane in more detail in the course unit on Afterlife Studies.





### 3.5 Constituents of Each Plane

Each universe has the same structure and layout as well as comprising thirty-one realms of existence arranged into three planes – the Sensuous Plane, the Form Plane and the Formless Plane.

#### 3.5.1 The Different Planes Defined

Sensuous Plane contains the abodes of beings whose minds are still attached to the temptation of the sensual pleasures. There are eleven realms within the sensuous Plane: one human realm, four hell realms and six heaven realms.

The Form Plane or Form-Brahma plane contains the realms of beings whose minds have attained the Form absorptions [*jhaana*]. The Brahma plane is located above the six heaven realms and is more refined than the heaven realms.

The Formless Plane or Formless-Brahma plane contains the realms of those who have attained the Formless absorptions. It is located above the Form Plane and is more refined than it. Each plane will now be examined in more detail.

### 3.6 Sensual Plane

The Sensual Plane contains the realms of beings whose minds are still attached to sensual pleasure. It comprises eleven realms: the human realm, four hell realms and six heaven realms. We will start with the human realm because this is the only place where meritorious and evil deeds can be performed to the full, leading to rebirth in the fortunate or unfortunate realms.

#### 3.6.1 Human Realm

The human realm [*manussaloka*] is endowed with beings who possess a high level of mind. The etymology of the Pali word for human, “*manussa*” is derived from ‘*mana-*’ meaning ‘mind’ and “*-ussa*” or “*-udama*”, meaning ‘high’. Being ‘human’ therefore means being virtuous, benevolent and courageous. The human realm is the abode of human beings who are residing in our continent as well as other three continents sharing the same universe with us.

The continents hosting the human realm are located at the compass points at the base of Mount Sumeru (the centre of the Universe), namely the Eastern, Western, Rose-Apple and Northern continents mentioned above.

The trees, leaves, seawater and sky in each continent take on their colors from the reflections of the gemstones located on each face of Mount Sumeru. There are 500 sub-continent associated with each continent. Human inhabitants on each sub-continent

have different appearances and ways of life from those inhabiting the continental mainland.

Human beings on each of the four continents look physically similar, only they have differing degrees of cultivation. For example, human beings inhabiting the Rose Apple Continent have oval faces. Those on the Western Continent have round faces similar to the full moon. Those on the Eastern Continent have faces in the shape of a slice of lemon. People on the Northern Continent have square faces. The shape of the human face on each continent reflects the shape of the continent itself. Humans inhabiting in the Rose Apple Continent are attractive or ugly according to the karma they bring over from previous lives. For the remaining three continents, all inhabitants look exactly the same because they have the same level of virtue as one another.

The following are the three characteristics that people in the Rose Apple Continent are better endowed with than those on other continents and even those of the second level of heaven.

1. They are determined to do meritorious deeds [*suurabhaava*] such as giving, keeping precepts and meditating
2. They strongly believe in the Triple Gems [*satimanta*]
3. They are able to ordain and live the holy life [*brahmacariyavaasa*]

Four special characteristics found only in people of the Rose Apple Continent are as follows:

1. **Being Courageous:** willing to do virtuous or evil deeds. Those who choose to do good can attain to Buddhahood or various levels of Buddhist sainthood. On the evil side, they can go to the extent of killing their parents or arahants, or bruising a Buddha. People in the other three continents would not be able to go so far.
2. **Being Rational:** in both appropriate and inappropriate ways. They tend to be able to understand the causes of concrete and abstract matters.
3. **Being Able to Understand Benefits and Harm of Things:** both worldly and supramundane benefits. Worldly benefits include gains, glory, praise, happiness, human and heavenly wealth. Levels of understanding however vary according to faith, perseverance, wisdom, perfection and who they associate with.
4. **Understanding Wholesomeness and Unwholesomeness:** whether it be worldly or transcendental wholesomeness. On the wholesome side, this would include giving, keeping precepts and meditating. On the unwholesome side it would include greed, hatred and delusion.

Those on the Northern Continent possess three characteristics more refined than those of the Rose Apple Continent and those of the second level heaven because:

1. They do not regard their wealth and possessions as their own.
2. They do not regard their children, wife or husband as their own.



3. They live up to 1,000 years.

There is nothing special about the Eastern and Western Continents. People there have similar lifestyle to those on the Rose Apple Continent. However, the states of mind do not have the potential to reach the extremes of those on the Rose Apple Continent. The Lord Buddha, the bodhisattva and the arahants are born to pursue perfection only on the Rose Apple Continent.

We are born as human beings because we possess the underlying virtues that makes us human beings – namely, the Five Precepts. Those who are not able to keep the Five Precepts will likely not regain human status.

### 3.6.2 The Four Unfortunate Realms

The unfortunate realms [*apaya*] of existence are the abodes where beings suffer pain and woe. The beings there are not able to perform any virtuous deeds. It is the lowest realm of existence and consists groups of of four levels: the hell realms, the animal realms, the hungry ghost realms and the realm of monsters.

**1. The Hell Realms** [*niraya*]: This is a realm of great pain. Inhabitants are woeful. The hell realms are vast and divided into larger and smaller levels. Beings in each level are punished in different ways depending on the evil deeds they had performed. The hell realms is divided into three main regions; the major hells, the satellite hells and purgatory.

#### 1.1 The Major Hells

The Major hell, comprising eight levels, is the largest region within the hell realms. Inside there are denizens of hell who are obliged to inflict punishment on those reborn in hell. These denizens arise spontaneously as the result of evil deeds done by their victim. The eight levels of major hell are as follows:

**1.1.1 Sañjiiva Hell** is known as the ‘undying’ hell. That means beings are brutally punished according to their evil deeds done in the past. They are punished in several ways such as being cut into pieces or being burned to death. When they die, a so-called “karmic wind” will blow and they will be born again in the same predicament as before. The cycle is repeated again and again until their karmic debt has been paid off. Killing is the main karma leading beings to be born in this major hell.

**1.1.2 Kaa.lasutta Hell** is known as the ‘hell of the black threads’ because in this level, the denizens of hell punish the victims by putting them on red-hot steel plates and marking them off with black steel threads as big as a palm tree before cutting the victim to pieces along the black marks. Stealing is the main karma earning a place for beings in this major hell.

- 1.1.3 Sa”ngha.ta Hell** is known as the ‘hell where bodies are crushed’. They are roasted in agony in the fires of hell before being crushed to death between two big steel mountains. Sexual misconduct is the main karma earning a place for beings in this major hell.
- 1.1.4 Roruva Hell** is known as the ‘hell that is filled with cries of pain’. Beings are laid face down in a steel lotus. As soon as they are up to their cheeks at one end and up to their toes and wrists at the other a fire flames up and incinerates the lotus with the victim inside. Telling lies is the main karma earning a place for beings in this major hell.
- 1.1.5 Mahaaroruva Hell** is known as the ‘hell that is filled with many cries of pain’. Beings are made to stand in a steel lotus which has sharp, black-hot petals. They are burned from head to toe, from the inside out through their nine bodily openings. The fire is so hot that this level of hell is sometimes called ‘the hell that is filled with fire-induced cries of pain’ [*jaalaroruva*]. Taking alcohol and drugs is the main karma earning a place for beings in this major hell.
- 1.1.6 Taapana Hell** is known as the ‘hell that is filled with incalculable heat’. Victims are forced to climb up onto the point of a spear the size of a palm tree engulfed in flame. They find ourselves impaled on the point of the spear and are burned like a chicken on a spit before being eaten by an enormous dog which tears the flesh from their bones. Being addicted to gambling is the main karma earning a place for beings in this major hell.
- 1.1.7 Mahaataapana Hell** is known as the ‘hell that is unbearably hot’. Beings are stabbed with swords and spears engulfed in flame as they are chased up a volcano before the acid rain blows down on them, while from below they are pierced by gigantic steel thorns. A life involved with the roads to ruin [*apayamukha*] is the main karma earning a place for beings in this major hell.
- 1.1.8 Aveci Hell** is known as the ‘hell that is without respite’ (lit. waves). In some of the hells there are times when the torment is more and times when it is less – but in this hell, the torment is continuous without letting up. It is the biggest hell that is full of terrors and the most frightful. It is surrounded by burning steel gates. There are more beings here than in other hells. They are punished in the same posture that they committed their evil deeds. Killing their parents, enlightened ones, harming a Buddha or creating a schism in the monastic community is the main karma earning a place for beings in this major hell.

## 1.2 Satellite [*Ussada*] Hells

A satellite hell is a group of realms occupied by those who have already exhausted their retribution in the relevant Major Hell. Around each level of Major Hells there are sixteen satellite hells (four in each of the compass directions). Therefore, there are a total of 128 satellite hells. Satellite hells that are located in the equivalent direction of

each Major hell are referred to by the same name as that Major Hell but differ in degrees of severity:

- 1.2.1 Worm [guutha] Satellite Hell:** This level of hell is full of needle-toothed worms as big as elephants, which devour victims to death not even leaving the bones. Smaller worms devour the victims bodily organs from the inside.
- 1.2.2 Glowing Coals [kukku.la] Satellite Hell** This level is full of black-hot glowing coals which burn the victims there to death. They come back to life and are burned to death in the same way over and over again until their retribution is exhausted.
- 1.2.3 Sword-Leaf [asipatta] Satellite Hell:** When victims in the hell enter a mango grove, mango leaves which are sharp like swords or spears fall on them, piercing their limbs. As they run away iron walls engulfed in flame suddenly grow up out of the ground to cut off every direction they try to escape and the victims have the flesh stripped off them by metal mouthed dogs and vultures until they die.
- 1.2.4 Caustic River [vetara.ni] Satellite Hell:** The victims are scarred with a metal net then thrown in caustic water which becomes engulfed in flame burning them. If they slip under water they are cut by sharp metal lotus petals and leaves. They thrash about just like a fish which is being beaten over the head. They are then pulled up and pierced with spears by the denizens of the satellite hell and left on a spike, like a fish on a hook. They are then put on a hot steel plate and forced to take in hot water and hot molten steel until they are burn up from the inside and die.

### 1.3 Purgatory [Yamaloka]

Those whose retribution has not yet been exhausted come to this level of hell after traversing the satellite hells. Each Major hell has ten Purgatory realms around it at each of the four compass points. There are a total of 320 units of Purgatory if all eight Major hell are counted. There is no real difference between the purgatories in the different directions or attached to different levels of major hell except for degrees of severity. Inside the purgatory, a judge with his jury decides what realm beings should be sent to next. The judge and jury are angels, unlike the denizens of hell who arise spontaneously by force of the bad karma of each victim. The ten Purgatories are as follows:

- 1.3.1 Lohakumbhii Purgatory:** Beings are thrown into a cauldron as tall as a mountain filled to the brim with molten metal. Sometimes the victims are strangled with a steel rope by the denizens of the purgatory. Killing is the main karma earning a place for beings in this purgatory.
- 1.3.2 Simbalii Purgatory:** Male and female victims are forced to take turn to climb a yew tree which has sharp, burning thorns to meet with one another. The thorns tear them to shreds as they climb up or down.

Sometimes they are attacked by steel-beaked crows as they climb. Adultery is the main karma earning a place for beings in this purgatory.

- 1.3.3 Asinakha Purgatory:** Beings gouge out their own flesh with their own long, sharp finger- and toenails as their only source of food. Stealing is the main karma earning a place for beings in this purgatory.
- 1.3.4 Taambodaka Purgatory:** Beings are forced to lie face up on a red-hot steel plate. The denizens of the purgatory bring red-hot smelted copper and pour this down the victims' throat until they die. Drinking intoxicants is the main karma earning a place for beings in this purgatory.
- 1.3.5 Ayogul.a Purgatory:** Beings are so starving hungry that they eat blocks of red-hot steel which burn them to death from the inside. Embezzlement is the main karma earning a place for beings in this purgatory.
- 1.3.6 Pissakapabbata Purgatory:** Beings are crushed to death by four mountains which come flying at them from four directions simultaneously. Being an unjust ruler is the main karma earning a place for beings in this purgatory.
- 1.3.7 Dhusa Purgatory:** Thirsty beings encounter a shady pool where they drink. Through the retribution of their karma, the water turns to dry husks inside them which catches fire burning them to death from the inside. Being an unscrupulous merchant is the main karma earning a place for beings in this purgatory.
- 1.3.8 Siitalosita Purgatory:** Beings are thrown into icy water where they freeze to death. As soon as they are dead, they come back to life only find themselves being thrown into the water again. Drowning live animals is the main karma earning a place for beings in this purgatory.
- 1.3.9 Sunakha Purgatory:** This purgatory is filled with five types of dogs – black, white, yellow, red and spotty dogs. Beings are chased and savaged to death by these dogs. Using harsh speech against one's parents, older relatives or those pure in their precepts is the main karma earning a place for beings in this purgatory.
- 1.3.10 Yantapaasaa.na Purgatory:** Beings are crushed to death by two mountains which come flying at them from opposite directions simultaneously. Mistreating one's spouse is the main karma earning a place for beings in this purgatory.





## 1.4 Lokanta Hell

This is the special level of hell where there is eternal darkness. The beings condemned there have huge bodies. They cling on to the rim of the cosmos by their fingernails. If they encounter fellow victims in the hell, they assume they are each others' food and attack each other mercilessly. Sometimes they fall into an icy sea of acid which eats away their body. Once out of the acid, they re-affix themselves on the rim of the cosmos. They endure torment in this way here for an undefined length of time. Only when a Buddha becomes enlightened, is there ever a brief flicker of brightness in the darkness there. Having extreme False View – False View so bad they can even hurt monks – is the main karma earning a place for beings in this level of hell.

### Comparative Age of Hell Beings and Human Beings

Great Hell	Lifespan (in Hell Years)	1 Day in Hell (in Million Earth Years)	Lifespan (in Million Earth Years)
1. Sañjiiva Hell	500	9	1,620,000
2. Kaa.lasutta Hell	1,000	36	12,960,000
3. Sa"ngha.ta Hell	2,000	144	103,680,000
4. Roruva Hell	4,000	576	831,040,000
5. Mahaaroruva Hell	8,000	1,304	6,635,520,000
6. Taapana Hell	16,000	9,216	53,084,160,000
7. Mahaataapana Hell	Approximately half a sub-aeon [ <i>antarakappa</i> ]		
8. Aveci Hell	Approximately one sub-aeon [ <i>antarakappa</i> ]		

## 2. Pittivisaya Realm

The realm of hungry ghosts [*pittivisaya*] is inhabited by beings wandering around in the forest, hills, sea or islands. After they have broken free of hell, they are born as hungry ghosts [*peta*] who suffer from hunger and search in vain for food and clothing. Because of unwholesomeness in their past lives they are reborn in this realm.

There are twelve types of hungry ghosts as follows:

1. Hungry ghosts eating spittle, phlegm and vomit [*vantaasa-peta*]
2. Hungry ghosts eating human or animals corpses [*ku.napaasa-peta*]
3. Hungry ghosts eating feces [*guuthakhaadaka-peta*]
4. Hungry ghosts with a burning month [*aggijaalamukha-peta*]
5. Hungry ghosts with a mouth the size of the eye of a needle [*sucimukha-peta*]
6. Hungry ghosts suffering from hunger and thirst [*ta.nha.d.dita-peta*]
7. Hungry ghosts with a body like a burning tree trunk [*sunijhaamaka-peta*]

8. Hungry ghosts with long and sharp finger- and toenails [*sattha"nga-peta*]
9. Gigantic hungry ghosts [*pabbata"nga-peta*]
10. Hungry ghosts with a body like a boa-constrictor [*ajagara"nga-peta*]
11. Hungry ghosts endowed with its own heavenly mansion which it can use only during the day [*vemaanika-peta*]
12. Powerful hungry ghosts ruling other hungry ghosts in the forests at the foot of the Himalayas [*mahiddhika-peta*]

There are also other types of hungry ghosts. One type of them, the '*paradattuupajivi*' hungry ghost, can receive and rejoice in merit transferred from their living relatives as they often reside around their previous human homes.

### 3. Monster [*asuurakaaya*] Realm

This realm is the abode of unrelenting and dejected demons. Some of them are starving and emaciated. Their eyes and mouths are so small that it causes them difficulty in looking for food and eating. Stealing and embezzling monastic money are major karma for this state of rebirth. There are three types of Monster as follows:

1. **Angelic Monster [*angel-asuurakaaya*]**: these live their lives similarly to angels. They reside in a big comfortable tunnel beneath the three mountains supporting Mount Sumeru.
2. **Hungry-Ghost Monsters [*petti-asuurakaaya*]** suffer in the same way as hungry ghosts.
3. **Hell-Bound Monsters [*niraya-asuurakaaya*]** live the most suffering lives in the Lokanta Hell.

It seems monsters are quite similar to hungry ghosts, however they differ in that the hungry ghosts suffer from hunger but monsters generally suffer from thirst as they can barely get to water. Some of them have had nothing to drink for millions of millions years.

Monsters live harder lives than hungry ghosts. They are uglier and more frightening. Therefore, they are ashamed to be seen. This is why 'lacking courage' [*asuura-*] is included in the etymology of their name.

### 4. The Animal [*tiracchaana*] Realm

The animal realm is home to all animals whether it be dogs, cats, rats, chickens, ducks, snakes or fish. Animals can not attain Nirvana in that form. They can only go to heaven at the most.



The animals do not suffer as much as hungry ghosts or monsters. They tend to derive enjoyment from only three types of pleasure; eating, sleeping and sexual intercourse. The etymology of the word 'Ti-' + '-racchaano' derives from these beings enjoyment of only three pleasures.

There are four groups of animals as follows:

1. **Animals with No Feet [apada-tiracchaano]** including snakes, fish and intestinal worms
2. **Biped Animals [dvipada-tiracchaano]** including chickens, ducks and crows.
3. **Quadruped Animals [catupada-tiracchaano]** including dogs, cats, elephants, horses, cows and buffalo.
4. **Many-Footed Animals [apada-tiracchaano]** including all animals which have more than four legs, whether it be ants, termites or centipedes.

Animals share the same plane of existence as human beings. They are generally visible to the naked eye, unlike hungry ghosts and monsters which cannot be seen under ordinary circumstances. Animals move from place to place and live harder lives than human beings. They are attacked by predators, face hunger and have no fixed abode.

There is, however, another type of animal that live in the Himavanta Forest (of the first level of heaven). They are a higher class of animals and are not visible to the naked eye.

Delusion is the main karma leading beings to be born as animals. Delusion includes for example being obsessed with one's wealth or loved ones. Others come to the animal realm to use up residual retribution after having passed through the realms of hell, hungry ghosts or monsters. Rebirth as animals usually continues repeatedly for several lifetimes. They therefore they barely have the chance to accrue merit.

### 3.6.3 The Six Heaven Realms

The heaven realms are a celestial place occupied by angels. Angels are self-luminous as a result of meritorious deeds brought over from the past life. They spontaneously arise [opapaa.tika] in heaven in adult form. They are not born from a mother's womb or an egg. The level of merit accrued during the human life determines the level of heaven in which they are reborn. There are six levels of heaven: the Heaven of the Four Great Kings [Caatummaaraajika], the Heaven of the Thirty-Three [Taavat.imsa], the Heaven of the Yaamaa Gods [Yaamaa], the Heaven of the Satisfied Gods [Tusita], the Heaven of the Gods who rejoice in their own creations [Nimmaanarati], the Heaven of the Gods who Lord over the creation of others [Paranimmitavasavattii]:

## 1. The Heaven of the Four Great Kings [Caatumahaaraajika]

This lowest level of heaven is ruled by the Four Great Kings and is located on Mount Sumeru. It is under the dominion of the second level of heaven. This heaven is closer to the human realm than any other levels of heaven. This heaven includes four major areas each of which are full of pleasant places such as scented lotus-ponds, flowers-gardens and fruit groves. The four areas are ruled by the four kings as follows:

- 1) **King Dhataratha** rules over the eastern region of Catummaharajika. He governs three groups of angels – the celestial musicians, sorcerers and ogres.
  - i. **Celestial Musicians** [*gandhabba*] are angels who are born and live in ten scented parts of wood; root, heartwood, wood, bark, sap, bough, leaves, flower, fruit and underground root. There are three classes of them; higher, middle and lower class. Higher-class angels such as Pañcasikkha dwell in heavenly mansions in the first level of heaven and have their own retinue. Middle-class angels or tree sprites are born in the Himavanta Forest. They are followers of higher-class angels. Lower-class Angels share the human realm. Some of them have family -- some do not. They are a type of tree sprites dwelling in fragrant trees such as the Malabar ironwood tree. Celestial musicians are gifted with ability in music, drama, dancing, arts, literature and poetry. It is their duty to entertain other angels. To be born as celestial musicians, they performed both meritorious deeds but also indulged in sensual pleasure.
  - ii. **Sorcerers** [*vidhayaadhara*] are those knowledgeable in various disciplines including the eighteen Liberal Arts, Medicine, Astrology and Science. They are able to fly and capable of working magic and casting spells. Some of them live by themselves but others live in a group. Some are married, some are not. Some are ascetics. Some are similar to human beings.
  - iii. They are endowed with strange appearance: with curly hair, dark complexion, a big belly, pot-shape testicles and no fangs, not as frightening as ogres. They are also divided into higher and lower classes. These celestial musicians also have the duty to punish beings in purgatory, part-time.
- 2) **King Virulahaka** rules the Southern part of the first level of heaven. This part where the Garuda reside. Pride and stubbornness while performing meritorious deeds is the main karma earning a place for beings in this region of heaven as a Garuda.
- 3) **King Viruupakka** is in charge of the Western part of the first heaven, which is the realm of Nagas. Pride and stubbornness while performing meritorious deeds is the main karma earning a place for beings in this region of heaven as a Naga.

- 4) **King Vessava.na or King Kuvera** rules the Northern part of the first heaven and all ogres [*yakkha*]. Some ogres are endowed with great beauty and are self-luminous. Others such as water demons, are ugly, frightening, ferocious and aggressive. Anger and irritation while performing meritorious deeds is the main karma earning a place for beings in this region of heaven as an ogre.

There are also other lower-class angels such as earth sprites, tree sprites and air sprites.

- **Earth Sprites** share our human realm dwelling in termite mounds, hillocks, underground caves, mountains, rivers, houses, pagodas, pavilions or arches. Some of them have their own heavenly mansion.
- **Tree Sprites** dwell in the branches or trees and in the treetops. Some reside in heavenly mansions, others not.
- **Air Sprites** are endowed with their own heavenly mansions located around 16 kilometers (one league [*yojana*]) above the ground. These types of angels are under the rule of the Four Great Kings.
- **Celestial Musicians** have their differences from earth sprites. Whereas the former would never leave their homes in the woods even if it were damaged, the later would move to a new tree together with their heavenly mansion if the tree were cut down.

The Himavanta is a golden forest. Everything including the ground, leaves, etc. are in gold. It is located at the slope of Mount Sumeru. Formerly, it was a continuation to the four continents. However, when human beings started to commit more unwholesome deeds, the land separated preventing travel between the human realm and the Himavanta forest. The Himavanta forest consists of 84,000 mountain peaks, five main rivers; Ganga, Yamuna, Sarabhuu, Aciravadii and Mahimaa. It has seven main ponds; Anotatta, Ka.n.namu.n.da, Rathakaala, Chaddanta, Mandakinii, Siihappaata and Ku.nala. Around the Anotatta pond are five mountains; Sudassana, Cittakuu.ta, Kaa.lakuu.ta, Kailash and Gandhamaadana in which are located a cave named Nandamuula where many Paccekabuddhas live. Within the Nandamuula are three caves; one of gold, one of crystal and one of silver. There are many extraordinary creatures residing in Himavanta such as half-bird half-human creatures, naagas, garudas, heraldic lions and special types of elephant, bird, fish and fruit.

## 2. The Heaven of the Thirty-Three [*Taavati.msa*]

The heaven of the thirty three is a vast heaven realm located at the summit of Mount Sumeru, surrounded by crystal mansions and walls with a thousand crystal gates. At the center of Taavat.imsa is a castle named Vejayanta, decorated with seven types

of gems. It belongs to King Sakka (sometimes known as King Indra) the ruler of the realm. This heaven is divided into thirty-two districts, each of which governed by one of thirty-two close friends of Sakka. Residents here can include those who have attained the lower stages of Buddhist sainthood, such as once-returners [*sakadagaami*] and stream-enterers [*sotapanna*] – as well as those who have attained the Triple Gem inside and angels in general.

### **3. The Heaven of the Yaamaa Gods [Yaamaa]**

The heaven of the Yaamaa Gods is ruled by Suyaama Angel. This heaven is located far above the second level of heaven. Unlike the lowest two levels of heaven, Yama has no solid ground. It is located in a place far beyond the light of the sun and the moon. Angels there can see things by the light of their own bodies. They calculate the passing of time by looking at the heavenly flowers which bloom during the day but close at night.

### **4. The Heaven of the Satisfied Gods [Tusita]**

This fourth level of heaven is ruled by King Santatusita. Inhabitants of the Heaven of the Satisfied Gods are those who have resolved to attain enlightenment for the benefit of their fellow-men. They choose the Heaven of the Satisfied Gods as a 'resting place' on their way to enlightenment. They are graceful, blessed and cheerful in Dhamma. They live in magnificent heavenly mansions. The future Buddha is even now residing in the Heaven of the Satisfied Gods. King Santatusita is in fact the former mother of the present Buddha. The inhabitants of the Heaven of the Satisfied Gods are endowed with generosity. They want to help other people. When they are born as human beings, their heavenly mansions and wealth in heaven wait for them, unlike angels in other levels of heaven whose heavenly wealth disappear when they return to be reborn on earth.

### **5. The Heaven of the Gods Who Rejoice in Their Own Creations [Nimmaanarati]**

This fifth level of heaven is ruled by King Sunimmita. Angels on Nimmanarati are able to conjure up anything they wish.

### **6. The Heaven of the Gods Who Lord over the Creation of Others [Paranimmitavasavattii]**

This sixth level of heaven is the highest and largest. Angels on this level get whatever they want through having them conjured up by other angels.

### Causes of Birth on Each Level of Heaven

To be born in heaven requires a person to perform virtuous deeds and accrue sufficient merit. The degree of wealth and refinement may vary according to the degree and type of intention behind the meritorious deeds, which can be categorized as follows:

1. **Fear-Driven:** These people perform good deeds because they do not want to go to hell, if it really exists. They do not have pure intention to cultivate such good deeds. This can be compared to a child doing good deeds just because they do not want to be punished. These people tend to be born as mere earth-, tree- and air sprites.
2. **Reward-Driven:** These people cultivate merit just because they want something in return. This can be compared to a child doing good deeds hoping to get candies or toys. These people tend to be reborn as angels in at best the lowest level of heaven.
3. **Admiration-Driven:** These people perform good deeds because they crave praise. This can be compared to a child doing good because they want to be accepted by others. These people tend to be reborn as angels in at best the lowest level of heaven.
4. **Merit for Merit's Sake:** These people perform meritorious acts because they think it is the right thing to do. They are confident of their righteous deeds regardless of others' opinions. They tend to be reborn as angels in the second level of heaven or higher depending upon purity of their mind while they are performing the merit.

### Comparative Age of Angels on Heaven and Human Beings

Heaven	Lifespan (in Heaven Years)	Length of One Day & One Night in Heaven (in Earth Years)	Lifespan (in Millions of Earth Years)
1. Catummaharajika	500	50	9
2. Taavat.imsa	1,000	100	36
3. Yaamaa	2,000	200	144
4. Tusita	4,000	400	576
5. Nimmanarati	8,000	800	2,304
6. Paranimmitavasavatti	16,000	1,600	9,216



### 3.7 Form Plane

The Form-Plane or Form-Brahma world is inhabited by Form-Brahmas. The Form Plane is located higher than heaven realms with finer and more delicate heavenly treasure.

A Brahma is a divine being who has become fully restrained from sense-pleasure [*kaamachanda*] from a time when they were still human beings. A Brahma looks more like a man than a woman. Human beings who have attained the form-absorptions [*ruupa-jhaana*] will be born in the Form Plane. The Form Plane is further divided into sixteen levels each of which is inhabited by beings with different levels of absorptions.

#### 1. The Three Realms of the First Absorption

Those inhabiting this realm are those who have attained the first absorption. The following three levels of this first-absorption realm are located on the same level as one another, rather than being one above the other like for heaven realms:

- a. **Realm of the Great Brahmas' Attendants [Brahmaparisajjaa]:** The inhabitants are brahmas who have attained the beginning level of first-absorption. They are ordinary Brahmas with no extraordinary power. They are followers of the Great Brahmas.
- b. **Realm of the Great Brahmas' Ministers [Brahmapurohitaa]:** The inhabitants are Brahmas who have attained the medium level of first absorption. They help the Great Brahmas with various tasks.
- c. **Realm of the Great Brahmas [Mahabrahma]:** The inhabitants are Brahmas who have attained the highest level of first absorption. They are leaders of the first two types of Brahmas. Sahampati Brahma who originally invited the Lord Buddha to share his message with teachable beings was also an inhabitant of this realm. Brahmas who have attained the highest level of first absorption will be at the center of each realm and surrounded by those who have attained lower levels of Absorption.

#### 2. The Three Realms of the Second Absorption

The second absorption sphere is inhabited by those who have attained the second level of Absorption. It is located above the three realms of the first absorption.

- a. **The Realm of the Brahmas of Limited Luster [Parittaabhaa]** is (*'paritta'* means limited, *'-aabha'* means luster).
- b. **The Realm of the Brahmas of Infinite Luster [Appamanabha]**
- c. **The Realm of Brahmas with Radiant Luster [Aabhasaraa]:** Beings are reborn here as a result of their bright and clear mind.

### **3. The Three Realms of the Third Absorption**

Those inhabiting the third absorption sphere are those who have attained the third level of absorption. It is located above the three realms of the second absorption.

- a. **The Realm of Brahmās with Limited Aura [Parittasubhāa]** These beings have an aura as that of the moon, however, less brilliant than that of Brahmās in higher realms.
- b. **The Realm of Brahmās with Infinite Aura [Appamaa.nasubhāa]**
- c. **The Realm of Brahmās with Steady Aura [Subhaki.nhāa]**

### **4. The Seven Realms of the Fourth Absorption**

The fourth absorption sphere is inhabited by those who have attained the fourth level of Absorption, including:

- a. **The Realm of Brahma with Abundant Rewards [Vehapphalāa]:** The power of merit there is exempt from destruction and dissolution. Among Brahmās in the nine levels mentioned so far, those in the realm of Brahmās with steady aura live the longest lives. They live sixty-four world cycles. Anyone who reaches sixty-four world cycles will return to be reborn during the re-evolving of the world system. Then, followed by other Brahmās with shorter lives. After sixty-four world cycles, the third absorption sphere will be destroyed by wind. However, the Realm of Brahmās with abundant rewards is resistant to destruction by fire, water or wind. Brahmās in Vehapphala therefore live for 500 world-cycles.
- b. **The Realm of Non-Percipient Beings [Asaññīsattaā]:** These beings are endowed with no sensation [*vedanaā*], perception [*saññāā*], mental formations [*sa”nkhaara*] or consciousness [*viññāā.na*]. They are only endowed with the aggregate of corporeality with the ability to put out all feelings -- but they still have defilements. They have a golden form similar to a Buddha image, and can take any one of the three postures; sitting, lying, or standing, depending on the position they died in, in their previous life. They will remain in such a position throughout their lives.

Both realms in the fourth absorption sphere are located higher than the third absorption sphere. Brahmās in the higher realms can see those in the lower realms but those in the lower realms can not see those in the higher ones. Form-Brahmās in the eleven realms mentioned so far will all return to reborn in hell or heaven, depending on their past karma, for as long as they have not attained the stages of sainthood.



## 5. The Five Pure Abodes [Suddhavasa]

There are five levels categorized by purity of the following five faculties: faith [*saddha*], effort [*viriya*], mindfulness [*sati*], concentration [*samaadhi*] and wisdom [*pañña*].

- a. **The Realm of Brahmas Who Do Not Fall from Prosperity [Avihaa]:** These are brahmas in whom *faith* is the strongest of faculties. They will not be reborn before reaching their allotted span. Brahmas in the four higher realms however can choose to be born before reaching their allotted span.
- b. **The Realm of Serene Brahmas [Atappaa]:** These are brahmas in whom *perseverance* is the strongest of faculties. They never fall from happiness because their mind is immersed in meditation the whole of the time. They are free from all mental hindrances [*nivara.na*]
- c. **The Realm of Beautiful Brahmas [Sudassaa]:** These are brahmas in whom *mindfulness* is the strongest of faculties. They therefore have the Five Eyes of the Blessed One; physical eye which is exceptionally powerful and sensitive, the Divine Eye, the Wisdom Eye, the Buddha Eye and the All-seeing Eye. They are endowed with great beauty – a pleasure for all others to look upon.
- d. **The Realm of Brahmas Who Are Clear-Sighted [Sudassii]:** These are brahmas in whom *concentration* is the strongest of faculties. They can see even more clearly than Beautiful Brahmas especially through their physical eyes, Divine Eye and Wisdom Eye. However, their Buddha Eye are equally powerful as those of the Beautiful Brahmas.
- e. **The Realm of the Supreme Brahmas [Akanittha]:** These are brahmas in whom *wisdom* is the strongest of faculties. Akanittha Brahmas are endowed with the greatest heavenly wealth and happiness. Brahmas in the four other realms of the Pure Abodes are able to move into upper realms but Supreme Brahmas are born and die in their own realm. Within the Realm of Supreme Brahmas an important sanctuary is located named the Dussa-Cetiya. Kept in this monument are the royal robes of Prince Siddhattha which he renounced on the day of his ordination. Gha.tikaara Brahma came down from the Supreme Brahma realm to offer the eight requisites to the ordaining prince. He kept the robes together with one of the requisites, in the Dussa-Cetiya which is about 192 kilometers (twelve leagues [*yojana*]) in height.

The Pure Abodes appear only when the teachings of the Lord Buddha are available as it is the realm of ones who have attained the third stage of Buddhist sainthood. When there is no appearance of Buddhism, those attaining this level of mind cannot come into existence either. Therefore, the Pure Abodes arise only at certain times. They only last less than the collective lifespan of the Five Pure Abodes which is about 31,000 world-cycles. After that all Buddhist saints will come to an end of rebirth and the Pure Abodes disappear. They will reappear again when the next Lord Buddha arises – coming full circle.

### Age of Form-Brahmas in the 16 Form Plane

Form Plane	Lifespan
1. Great Brahmas' Attendants	One-twelfth of a world cycle <sup>1</sup>
2. Brahmas' Ministers	One-sixth of a world cycle
3. Great Brahmas	One quarter of a world cycle
4. Brahmas of Limited Luster	2 world-cycles
5. Brahmas of Infinite Luster	4 world-cycles
6. Brahmas of Radiant Luster	8 world-cycles
7. Brahmas with Limited Aura	16 world-cycles
8. Brahmas with Infinite Aura	32 world-cycles
9. Brahmas with Steady Aura	64 world-cycles
10. Brahmas with Abundant Rewards	500 world-cycles
11. Non-Percipient Beings	500 world-cycles
12. Brahmas Who Do Not Fall from Prosperity	1,000 world-cycles
13. Serene Brahmas	2,000 world-cycles
14. Beautiful Brahmas	4,000 world-cycles
15. Clear-sighted Brahmas	8,000 world-cycles
16. Supreme Brahmas	16,000 world-cycles

### 3.8 Formless Plane

Formless Plane is the formless world or the world of Formless-Brahmas. It is located higher than Form-Plane and endowed with greater heavenly wealth.

Formless-Brahma is more beautiful and self-luminous than Form-Brahma. They are born as Formless-Brahmas because they have attained formless absorptions. Formless-Brahmas can also be beings with handicaps [*abhabbasatta*] who are unable to attain enlightenment in that life time (Brahmas on the level of non-percipient beings are also considered handicapped). The Formless Plane includes the following four levels each of which are inhabited by those who have attained different levels of absorption:

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<sup>1</sup> Kappa Sutta A.ii.142

1. **The Realm of Infinite Space [Aakaasaanañcaayatana]** is inhabited by those who have attained first formless-absorption. They use infinite space as meditation object and can live up to 20,000 world-cycles.
2. **The Realm of Infinite Consciousness [Viññā.nañcaayatana]** is the realm of those who have attained second formless-absorption. They use space as meditation object. They live up to 40,000 world-cycles.
3. **The Realm of Nothingness [Akiñcaññaayatana]** is the realm of those who have attained third formless-absorption. They think of nothing when they meditate. They live up to 60,000 world-cycles.
4. **The Realm of neither Perception nor Non-Perception [Nevasaññaanaasaññaayatana]** is the realm of those who have attained the fourth formless-absorption. They feel neither perception nor non-perception. They live up to 84,000 world-cycles.

## Conclusion

Having studied the structure of the universe, we can now appreciate how humans, as well as other living beings, are reborn endlessly in different realms and universes. Such rebirth inevitably brings us grief and sorrow. Beings born in hell suffer greatly from severe punishment. Human beings suffer from transience, suffering and death. Angels also suffer from lack of heavenly wealth. Even Brahmas suffer from not being as greatly self-luminous as others. No one experiences untainted happiness.

Therefore, as we already know these facts of life, we should try find release from the cycle of life by accruing as much merit as possible and leading other people to do so as well. Enough merit will lead us to true great happiness.

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# **CHAPTER 4**

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## **The Origins of the Earth and Mankind**

## Chapter 4

### The Origins of the Earth and Mankind

#### Units in this Chapter

#### 4.1 Timescale for the Rise and Fall of the Universe

#### 4.2 The Measurement of Time Suitable for the Age of the Universe

- 4.2.1 A Lifespan [*aayu-kappa*]
- 4.2.2 The Sub-Eon [*antara-kappa*]
- 4.2.3 The World Cycle Quadrant [*asa"nkheyya-kappa*]
- 4.2.4 The World Cycle [*mahaa-kappa*]

#### 4.3 Beliefs Concerning the Origins of the Earth

- 4.3.1 General Beliefs & Scientific Hypotheses

#### 4.4 The Origins of the Earth and Mankind According to Buddhist Theory

- 4.4.1 The Buddha's Motivation to Teach on Genesis
- 4.4.2 Rule of Thumb in Verifying Credibility of Dogma
- 4.4.3 The Origins of the Universe, the Earth, Mankind and All Beings

#### Chapter at a Glance

1. The Universe and the Earth have arisen and decayed countless times. In each period of time, arising, perpetuation and decay has taken so long that it is uncountable. Even a million years is short by comparison. The cycle of arising and destruction of the world began at the point when the fires incinerating the Earth burn out. The Universe was filled with empty air. Subsequently, the rain fell and flooded the Universe. Later, as the water level dropped, uncovering spheres of existence from form-planes down to the first level of heaven (the Heaven of the Four Great Kings), once the water had found a steady level sediments congealed and floated on the surface. These sediments, known as Curds of Earth, were yellow, sweet and fragrant. When Brahmas came down to eat Curds of Earth, they became human. Thereafter, humans the levels of defilements in the human mind increased causing the Curds of Earth to disappear. New coarser forms of food appeared in its place. Consequently the human body changed to exhibit sexual characteristics — male or female. There started to be reproduction by sexual intercourse and then the nomadic humans settled down in homes. Many kinds of animals were born. At this point, human defilements of greed, anger and delusion proliferated. With the decay of quality of mind, the quality of the environment was compromised. Earth was destroyed by fire, wind or water; and, the cycle of arising, perpetuation and destruction of the Earth and Universe came full circle. The world and the universe arose and decayed in this way countless times over the eons.

2. To calculate the period of time taken for the arising, perpetuation and decay of the Earth and Universe by mathematical or scientific units would be impossible. Our conventional units are too small. Buddhism is the only religion in the World that uses its own units to calculate the age of the Earth and Universe, which are a number referred to as 'an incalculable' ( $= 10^{140}$ ) and 'eon' [*kappa*] (including the lifespan [*aayu-kappa*], sub-eon [*antara-kappa*], World Cycle Quadrant [*asa"nkheyya-kappa*] and World Cycle [*mahaa-kappa*])
3. Buddhism is a religion of those who believe in cause and effect. The Buddha never taught people to accept things on blind faith but advocated considering the facts and verifying the truth for oneself. He told people not to accept things simply because of: 1. hearsay; 2. tradition; 3. report; 4. text or scripture; 5. logic; 6. inference; 7. reasoning; 8. theory; 9. probability, or; 10. respect for a teacher who says so.
4. Mankind originated from the Brahmas with Radiant Luster. In the first era, human beings were born by spontaneous arising. Humans arose instantly in adult form without needing a parent. Human beings at that time did not have sexual relations, had their own aura, could fly, were nourished by delight alone, had the same appearance as a Brahma and were long-lived. Later, the fragrance from the Curds of Earth tempted the Brahmas to taste it. Once they had tasted the curds, their auras disappeared and they could not fly anymore. Nonetheless, the Earth in the first era was comfortable; there wasn't any poverty. The only hardship was that fine food vanished, and was replaced by coarser food. Discrimination reared its ugly head because of differences in skin color. Gender differences caused humans to be attracted sexually to one another. Settling down in homes, hoarding and taking advantage of one another eventually caused a system of government to be set up. The first era of government was an absolute monarchy, with the monarch acting like a father taking care of his children. A wise man who of suitable characteristics, manners and who was respected would be selected as king [*kasatriya*] -- the etymology of which implies that at that time he was also leader of agriculture [*kaseta*]. Animals in the first days also arose by spontaneous birth. Elephants and horses were the first animals to appear on Earth. Humans only resorted to eating animals because those who had come to the human realm from the hell realms brought their angry and aggressive tendencies with them. They used to bear grudges against each other. Once they saw each other, they thought of killing. At first, they didn't kill to eat, but later on, humans experimented with eating meat and became addicted to its taste. As meat-eating became more widespread humans misunderstood that animals were born as their food.

### Chapter Objectives

This unit should give students the knowledge and understanding to be able to:

1. Explain the cycle of arising, perpetuation and destruction of the universe.
2. Explain the units of time suitable to description of the origins of the universe.

3. Explain principals to be considered before believing under the Buddhist method precisely.
4. Explain the origin of mankind, its characteristics, the first era of human livelihood, the origin of the first form of government on Earth, the origin of animals and the eating of meat precisely.

## Introduction

Many may have studied about the story of the origins of the universe, the earth and mankind, as this subject has attracted vast interest to humans ever since ancient times. Many people have created hypotheses and tried to search for the answers to the questions --- what is the origin of all beings? How is the earth created? Where do we come from? Who was the first human on the earth? In spite of much research, there are still no concrete answers to such questions.

In this chapter, we will learn about the origins of the universe, the earth, mankind and all other beings from a Buddhist perspective. Before studying these, we will explain the cycle of the arising, perpetuation and decay of the universe. This includes units of time suitable to measure the arising, perpetuation and decay of the universe.

### 4.1 Timescale for the Rise and Fall of the Universe

The origin of the universe, the earth, mankind and all beings takes place in many steps. They all go through arising, perpetuation and decay as mentioned earlier. The timescale involved in the arising, perpetuation and decay of the universe challenge conventional scientific units of measurement therefore Buddhism uses its own units of measure suitable for the calculations involved with the timescale of the arising, perpetuation and decay of the universe as described in its cosmology.

### 4.2 The Measurement of Time Suitable for the Age of the Universe

From the Lord Buddha's discoveries mentioned in Chapter 1, we realize that the timescale of the arising, perpetuation and decay of the universe is a very long time – even a million years is short by comparison. Thus when making measurements we are forced to use terms such as 'an Incalculable' [*asa<sup>2</sup>nkheyya*] (=  $10^{140}$ ) or the 'eon'<sup>1</sup> [*kappa*] to do justice to the immensity of the time under examination. Such terms are unique to Buddhism.

Therefore, the calculation on the timescale of the arising, perpetuation and decay of the universe cannot be done according to the conventional units of time which are too short. The unit of measure favored in Buddhism is the eon which can be divided into four types:<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> As Defined in the 1982 Rajapunditiasathana Thai Dictionary (3<sup>rd</sup> ed. 1987) p.207

<sup>2</sup> Thavin Wattirangkul Rao keu krai (Bangkok: 1987) p.35

**4.2.1 A 'Lifespan'** [*aayu-kappa*] means the average lifespan of beings in a certain realm, at a certain time in history. For instance, on earth, most people when the Buddha was alive had the lifespan of a hundred years so the 'lifespan' at that time was one hundred years. In the present day, the average lifespan is seventy-five years so the 'lifespan' is now seventy-five years. In heaven realms such as the Heaven of the Four Great Kings the 'lifespan' might be five hundred heaven years. The same principle can be applied to other realms

**4.2.2 A Sub-Eon** [*antara-kappa*] is the time it takes for the human 'lifespan' to reduce from 'an incalculable' (i.e.  $10^{140}$ ) years down to ten years and be restored again to 'an incalculable' years. One complete cycle thus takes a 'sub-eon'.

**4.2.3 A World Cycle Quadrant** [*asa"nkheyya-kappa*] is sixty-four sub-eons long. The Buddhist scriptures summarize four types of World Cycle Quadrant:<sup>3</sup>

1. **The era when the world goes up in flames** [*sa.mva.t.ta-asa"nkheyya-kappa*] The duration in which the universe is being destroyed is one World Cycle Quadrant.
2. **The era when the world has been completely destroyed** [*sa.mva.t.ta.t.thaayii-asa"nkheyya-kappa*] is the period when the universe is completely destroyed. There is only emptiness for ten World Cycle Quadrants.
3. **The era when the world is re-evolving** [*viva.t.ta-asa"nkheyya-kappa*] The duration is one World Cycle Quadrant.
4. **The golden age of the world** [*viva.t.ta.t.thaayii-asa"nkheyya-kappa*] This is the duration from the start of the universe to its full development. The earth, mountains, rivers, trees, oceans, the sun, the moon, stars, humans and animals appear. The duration is one World Cycle Quadrant [*asa"nkheyya-kappa*].

**4.2.4 The World Cycle** [*mahaa-kappa*] is the complete cycle of the universe through all four of the World Cycle Quadrants mentioned above. The duration of one World Cycle is a very long time and is undetermined. The Lord Buddha taught:<sup>4</sup>

"O! Monks! Supposing there was a metal container one league (sixteen kilometres) long, one league wide and one league tall. The container is filled with mustard seeds. If a man took one seed out of the container every one hundred years, even when all the mustard seeds have been removed, an eon is not yet over."

In another example:<sup>5</sup>

"O! Monks! Supposing there was a giant stone mountain one league long, one league wide and one league tall, with no holes in it and no caves. If a man were to take a thin cloth and wipe the mountain once every hundred

<sup>3</sup> Kappa Sutta A.ii.142

<sup>4</sup> Saasapa Sutta S.ii.182

<sup>5</sup> Pabbata Sutta S.ii.181



years. The time it takes for this mountain to be worn down to the ground is the same length as an eon.”

By now it will be easier for the reader to envisage the long duration of each stage in the world cycle. Although the Lord Buddha gave ample metaphors for the timescales involved, the actual time may be even longer. The cycle of the arising, perpetuation and decay of the universe has been going on continuously. It has gone through countless cycles – realizing this should make us weary of the cycle of existence and give us a sense of urgency to practice the Buddha’s teachings to the full.

### **4.3 Beliefs Concerning the Origins of the Earth**

#### **4.3.1 General Beliefs & Scientific Hypotheses**

Many theistic religions whether it be those of the ancient Egyptians, the Samaritans and the Babylonians, Christians, Brahmins, Moslems or Shintoists have believe that their god was responsible for creating the universe. The sun, the moon, the stars, the earth, mankind and all other beings are supposedly the work of a creator god; with each religion having scriptural accounts of their version of Genesis.

In the present day world, many new technologies and techniques are discovered by the hour. Such technologies have been used to verify or rule-out truths about the universe which have been taken on the basis of belief since ancient times – such as the hypothesis that the world and the universe came from the Big Bang or that the human race evolved from apes. Such hypotheses sound reasonable – but in the scientific process there are always new ideas to disprove the old ones. To date there are only hypotheses – nothing concrete enough to amount to a theory of the origin of the universe.

Buddhism also has a standpoint in this debate, and the accounts of Buddhist Genesis presented here are derived from the Buddhist scriptures predating science by almost 2,500 years.

### **4.4 The Origins of the Earth and Mankind According to Buddhist Theory**

#### **4.4.1 The Buddha’s Motivation to Teach on Genesis**

The Lord Buddha had described the origins of the universe, the earth, mankind and all the beings in the Agga~n~na Sutta<sup>6</sup>. This discourse, deals with the origins of the universe, the earth, mankind and all beings as well as how all these phenomenon have changed over time.

The main purpose of this teaching was not to explain Genesis but rather to undermine the Brahmin claims about the origin of the caste system. The

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<sup>6</sup> D.iii.80ff.

teaching was given to two novice monks named Vase.t.tha and Bhaaradvaaja, who had been born in the Brahmin priestly caste. At that time in India, there were four different castes in the system, which included:

1. The kingly caste.
2. The priestly caste.
3. The merchant caste.
4. The working caste.

The priestly caste was considered a high-level caste. The merchant caste was considered a medium-level caste and the workers were considered the lowest level caste. All members within these four levels of caste would look down one another. Members of one caste would not associate with those of others. If there was a male-female relationship between different levels of caste, the child born to the couple would be shunned as an outcaste). When Vase.t.tha and Bhaaradvaaja became Buddhist monks (the Brahmin religion generally looked down on Buddhist monks and called them 'shavelings') they were considered to have slipped to an inferior caste level – one purported to have originated from the *feet* of the Brahma.

The Lord Buddha explained about the origins of the caste system to the two novice monks. He described the universe from a time when it was still filled with water down to the time when the caste system was established. He concluded an individual is made superior or inferior according to the wholesome and unwholesome actions they have performed – rather than by an externally imposed categories. Although this teaching was not meant to explain the origins of the earth, mankind and all beings – it serves us well in knowing the Buddhist standpoint on the origins of life in the Creation debate.

#### **4.4.2 Rule of Thumb in Verifying Credibility of Dogma**

Those with previous beliefs about the origins of the universe may have reluctance concerning the Buddhist approach to these issues. Deciding what to believe is never an easy matter and in this respect the Buddha gave guidelines to test whether an argument is worthy of one's belief or not.

Because Buddhism is not a religion that forces anyone to believe in its teachings, it isn't concerned whether people having faith in the religion or not. Buddhism is a religion for those who have enough wisdom to decide for themselves. It is the religion that provides reasoning. When the Buddha presented teachings, he did so because he saw the benefits others could gain if they put them into practice. The teachings were not meant to be believed in, but the Buddha wanted people to reflect on them and prove the teachings to their own satisfaction. On this subject he taught:<sup>7</sup>

“It is right that you question. You have doubts in things which are worthy of questioning.

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<sup>7</sup> Kaalaama Sutta A.i.188

1. You should not follow the a teaching because of hearsay;
2. You should not follow the a teaching because of tradition;
3. You should not follow the a teaching because of report;
4. You should not follow the a teaching because of text or scripture;
5. You should not follow the a teaching because of logic;
6. You should not follow the a teaching because of inference;
7. You should not follow the a teaching because of reasoning;
8. You should not follow the a teaching because of theory;
9. You should not follow the a teaching because of probability
10. You should not follow the a teaching because of respect for a teacher who says so

If you know for yourself that an act is harmful or unwholesome, criticized by the wise, that if done to the fullest is of no benefit and will bring suffering -- you should refrain from such acts.”

Hence, it is not strange that someone will reject or disagree with stories about the origins of the earth. From the Buddhist point of view, it does not matter whether readers to believe in such stories immediately but it will be an advantage if they can eventually come to prove it for themselves.

#### **4.4.3 The Origin of the Universe, the Earth, Mankind and all Beings**

##### **Before the Origins of Mankind**

The universe, the earth and all beings all began with empty space. There was only emptiness (in chapter 2, we learn that “space” is a substance without the admixture of any other elements; it is a fundamental building block of all life). This space was left when the previous universe was destroyed by fire, water and wind – an event which we will learn more about in chapter 6.

Since the universe and the earth had arisen and decayed countless times and they continue to arise and fall away without any end in sight, it is difficult to pinpoint the beginning or the ending of the cycle exactly. The reconstitution of the universe described in this chapter is that which takes place after the universe had been destroyed by the fire.

The universe had been devoid of matter for a long period of time (so long that the length of time cannot be specified) until rain fell in a universe that had only space in it. In the beginning, the raindrops were very fine, but later their size increased until the drops were as big as the trunk of a palm tree. Due to the continuous rainfall, the water level increased until it flooded the entire universe.

The reason why the rain was able to stay in the universe was due to the support of the wind, which acted like a gigantic bowl. Hence, the wind helped pool the rainfall together instead of letting it scatter. This characteristic of the wind gradually caused the rainfall to cease and the water level gradually decreased. As the flood receded many heaven realms were uncovered all the way from the topmost Brahma-level down to the Heaven of the Four Great Kings.

When the flood receded to ground level, the water level stabilized. Precipitations from the congealing of coarse elements appeared floating on the

surface of the water. (By contrast the Brahma and heaven realms originated from the precipitation of elements so subtle they could not be seen with the naked eye.) The precipitations that congealed and floated on the water were similar to those of the lotus leaves that float on the water without sinking. These precipitations had a yellow-color, a sweet taste and a fragrance. They are referred to as “Curds of Earth” and later it was to become the substrate for many other forms of life and is otherwise known as “primal soil”.

After the ground was formed, foliage began to grow. The first breed of plants that grew was lotus trees -- those that grew in the open air (which is different from those in the present day which are always aquatic). These lotuses would always be the first plant forms to appear on a ‘freshly arisen’ Earth – however, the number of lotus flowers appearing on each tree at the beginning of each world-cycle might not be the same. Sometimes there would not be any flowers and for other world cycles there would be one to five flowers but not more than that. The number of lotus flowers appearing would indicate the number of Buddhas destined to be born in that world-period. For instance, at the beginning of our world-period five lotus flowers appeared meaning that five Buddhas would arise. As a result, this type of lotus is known as the “the prophetic lotus”.

### **The First Era of Humans**

Once the Earth had become habitable, a certain kind of celestial beings, called Brahmas of Radiant Luster, died from the Brahma realms and are born as humans because their Brahma lifespan has ended. Humans in the first era did not need parents to give birth to them -- they arose in adult form. This type of birth is called spontaneous arising [*opapaatika*].

Those humans’ sizes and appearance was the same as when they were Brahmas. They had no gender, their body had an aura – being self-radiant. They were able to fly in the air -- and delight, rather than solid food, was their staple diet.

The form of earth in this period was flat and was connected to the first level of heaven (Heaven of the Four Great Kings). Beings could come and go freely between the human realm and heaven at that time. Little by little, the world changed shape, breaking further and further away from heaven in measure of the increasing level of defilements people demonstrated in their actions of body, speech and mind. The flat-shaped earth swelled to become oval-shaped and eventually spherical. It took a long period of time to change the shape of the earth in each step. In the spherical earth era, human lifespan is less than 100,000 years.

### **Food in Earliest Days of the world**

The lifetime of humans in the first era was almost infinite until a certain man (there are many humans who were alive at that time, not just one or two) was tempted by the color and fragrance of the curds of earth to the point he wanted to taste them. Merely by licking the curds of earth with his tongue, their taste was absorbed and spread throughout his whole body. He really loved the taste

and ate more. The other beings followed his example and as a result of eating these solid curds of earth, their bodily aura and their inner brightness started to disappear. The whole world fell into darkness and humans became scared.

In the darkness, the god Suriya along with the sun suddenly arose to drive away the darkness. At that time, there was an arising of the moon and the stars so that daytime, nighttime, days, months, years and the seasons became discernable. These developments took place over a very long period of time.

The solid food not only removed their bodily aura, but caused their bodies to lose their bright complexion. The darkness of complexion varied from one being to another. Some were dark, others brighter -- depending on kamma from previous lives and their level of sensuality in the past. When the differences became apparent, those of brighter complexion looked down on the darker ones. As a result, of this discrimination, their bodies become coarser and they lost their ability to fly. In addition, this misdemeanor caused the environment to change. The curds of earth disappeared and became a sort of mushroom. It was still delicious, smelling sweet and appetizing. The more beings became dominated by defilements, the less refined their staple food became. The mushrooms degraded to creepers and eventually changed from creepers to rice.

The rice in that era was different from rice nowadays. The chaff was thin like the husk of cucumbers so that humans could eat the white-yellow rice grains whole, without threshing. Its taste was delicious, soft, sweet-smelling and full of nutrition. Just eating it could relieve a person of hunger and fatigue. The length of a rice grain in those days was about is around 1 cubit (according to body size of people at that time). One grain of rice was enough for 3-5 people. When humans wanted to eat, they would lay the rice grain out on a special kind of flat stone and the rice will be cooked automatically.

Due to the large stature of humans in the early era, which is a lot bigger than the current size, the rice stems were enormous. Its height was equal to a Yangna tree<sup>8</sup>. It is even bigger and taller than humans in that era. Normally, the ear of the paddy is upright. But when the rice is ripe, the ear bent down to a height that humans could easily reach. After the grain had been removed, it would quickly grow back. This rice could grow everywhere.

### **Existence of Human Organs**

Because there was an increase in the amount of coarser and inferior food (due to increased level of defilements in the human mind), the food that humans ate could not be absorbed as efficiently as before. Undigested waste accumulated in the body and digestive organs appeared together with sexual organs. Whether the sexual organs were male or female depended on the purity with which they have kept the Third Precept in previous lifetimes.

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<sup>8</sup> *D. alatus Roxb* which is 40-45 meters tall

The different gender characteristics between individuals fired a sexual appetite between them and eventually the onset of sexual intercourse. Sexual intercourse was previously unheard of for humans. The majority of the community shunned the minority who resorted to sexual intercourse chiding the couples to desist by criticism, abuse and eventually banishment. The banishment was described as follows:<sup>9</sup>

“Any humans caught copulating would be strewn with dust, ashes or cow dung and taunted ‘Rascal! To hell with you! Rascal! To hell with you! How can one human being do this to another . . . ?”

### **Creating Shelters**

Couples that had sexual intercourse, had to do so in secret. They had to build their own shelters where they could hide their shameful acts. They built houses and settled down. After people started having sexual intercourse more widely, womb-born [*jalaabuja*] birth started to become the most common. From that time onwards human beings were born from the womb rather than arising spontaneously.

Once humans built houses to stay in, they became too lazy to hunt for grains of rice and became greedy. When they went out for stalks of rice, instead of gathering enough just for that day they would pick more than they needed and hoarded it. As their greed increased, the quality of the stalks of rice worsened and the size became smaller. The husk on the rice thickened. Grains of rice didn't replace themselves when they were picked. They started to become scarce.

The fall from celestial beings to humans at the beginning of time was caused by giving into the temptation of the curds of earth – namely succumbing to desire on the part of the Brahmas. Having tried it once, the Brahma became slave to their defilements. The curds of earth were their downfall just as bait might be the downfall of a foolish fish.

Although the Brahmas were human at the beginning of time, the human lifespan was so long that it's lasted incalculable eons. Long life was possible because there was not as much pollution as there is now. Weather and seasons were not unbalanced but remained temperate. There was no need for shelter to keep the rain off and no need for shade to protect from the sun. The appearance of beings was similar to that of the Brahmas. There was no need to work for a living because there was no real hardship.

The world at the beginning of time was a world of comfort without any hardship. If there is any discomfort, it was insignificant and usually just a case of making do with something less pleasurable. For example, when there was a shortage of curds of earth, people were reduced to eating the less refined mushroom elements in the soil.

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<sup>9</sup> Aggañña Sutta D.iii.80

One change that had a major impact on the beauty or ugliness of people's complexions occurred at the beginning of time when people started to eat not because they *needed* to, but because they *wanted* to. Because the Brahma had delight as their staple food, other foods were not necessary. If one succumbed to their greed and started eating staple food fit for a human, coarse elements would remain in the body. Such residues cause the quality of skin complexion to worsen. However, if one consumes just enough to survive, there will be less coarse elements in the body. The skin will remain clear -- hence, their skin is more attractive than those who consume more.

It can be compared to mixing black paint into white. Because white paint is the color of purity, even mixing in only a little black, will turn the white gray. However, if we mix a lot more, the white will become black. Hence, people discriminated against one another on account of their skin color.

The bodies of the celestial beings lost their radiance as it became more solid, rather like a reaction that forms a chemical compound. The changes in their bodies were slow, similar to the changes of water put in a freezer. Water starts as a liquid, but once it gets cooler, it becomes marbled and when it reaches certain temperature, it finally becomes ice. Water doesn't become ice instantly. In the same way the bodies of the celestial beings changed to humans over the course of millions and millions of years.

The body of the primal human beings is much larger, taller and stronger than the equivalent in the present day. In Buddha scriptures such as the Buddhava.msa the dimensions of the men who became Buddhas is described. Some were as tall as sixty cubits.

In less ancient history, mysterious large-sized weapons were excavated like the weapons in Chinese Emperor Qin Shi Huang's burial site. Further examples are displayed in Thai National Museum although they are not from the beginnings of time. They obviously belonged to humans who had very large bodies and were very strong indicating that changes in environment had an impact on the human body over the years. Once the environment and nature became worse, the human body became smaller, weaker and more prone to illness. However, as we have learned, changes in the natural environment originate in changes in the quality of the mind.

### **The First Form of Government in this World**

When rice stalks became scarcer and further from the dwelling places, people then began getting territorial and setting boundaries around their land. Some people stole rice from others' land and eventually theft started to become a problem. When the thieves were caught, they lied about what they had done. Some even got violent with others harming them. The community therefore agreed to set up a government to keep law and order.

In the process of selecting a leader to govern the people, the people had to look for someone with sufficient wisdom, brilliance and majesty and awesome enough to be capable of governing all the people. Once they found someone

with these qualities, they elected him as king to govern the country. The king of the land laid down laws to facilitate peace and happiness in the community. The land was divided up in an equitable fashion. Thus, the first person respected as a monarch [Pali = *kasatriya*], meant a person who excelled in handling land [Pali = *kaseta*]. This system of government was the first such system in the world. Unlike the present day, monarchs in that era reigned like a father caring for their children.

Aside from the decision-making process of selecting a king, there were some people who seeing others engaging in wrongdoings, encouraged them to desist. These good people who led others to abstain from immoral behaviors were the precursors of the Brahmins. They all built huts covered with leaves from the forest and engaged in meditation on visual mental objects [*kasi.na*], the ten recollections and introspection. They did not go out and make a living like other people in this world, but instead procured food by depending on alms. The villagers saw these people as above immorality and wrongdoing – an example of virtue which the villagers could not yet manage themselves. This made the villagers happy to support the Brahmins with food. Once they had received alms, they continued to strive in concentration until meditation arises. These people were also referred to as ‘absorption attainers’ [*jhaayikaa*].

Some Brahmins who engaged in meditation were unable to make progress. Instead of meditating, they went on trips around the community and wrote scriptures. Those Brahmins were known as ‘courteous ones’ [*ajjhaayika*]. In the ancient era, this word was probably perjorative. But today, it has taken on a positive meaning. Those who lived a family life and had to work for a living were referred to as the working caste [*vessaa*]. Later the term ‘vessaa’ was reserved for the merchants (those who owned the businesses) while the term ‘*suuda*’ was used to denote employees or manual workers.

### **The Birth of Animals**

Afterwards, animals started to arise in the world with elephants and horses being the primal species. They manifested themselves in large amounts. People were able to tame elephants and horses as beasts of burden in cultivating the land and as pack animals to use for transportation. Before using them, people first rounded-up all these animals and selected the animals that had the best qualities to offer to the king and then had the king divide up the animals for the use of the citizens.

Once humans had selected a king to govern their society, people were obedient to the laws he laid down. However, the level of defilements in the human mind did not lessen, but worsened. Thus, the staple foods available became coarser; the food changed from the previously aromatic rice to become less beneficial and savory forms of food such as vegetables and fruits which arose spontaneously. They appeared in fully grown form. There was no need to plant a seed and wait for it to grow. Once humans saw this, they harvested it and ate it along with the rice. In the beginning, even the stalks could be eaten raw and there was no need to add flavoring or cook it as we do today.



As mens' level of desire increased, new forms of animals manifested themselves. These animals used to be denizens of the unfortunate realms in another universe – some being denizens of hell, hungry ghosts [*peta*], monsters [*asuurakaaya*] or animals. When the former universe these animals lived in came to the end of its natural life, because these animals had not exhausted their bad karmic retribution, they were reborn in *this* universe to continue using up their karma. Whichever animals had the retribution to become animals were born as animals in this new cosmos.

Animals in the primal era were like humans – namely that they were born by the mode of spontaneous arising. They were born immediately in adult form with no need for parents. The type of animal they were born as depended on the combination of residual greed, hatred and delusion in the mind. Most of those being born as animal had a predominance of delusion. However, if there was more anger than delusion, they would tend to be born a carnivore. If there was more predominance of greed than hatred, then a herbivore would result. If greed and anger were in equal proportions, the animal would be born an omnivore. Greed, hatred and delusion are like the primary colors from which any other color can be mixed. The combination of just three defilements can give a full spectrum of species.

The only sort of animals that were born before the plethora of animal species were elephants and horses, which are considered high-level animals and are born in the fashion of spontaneous arising. After that, other types of animals were born. In the beginning these animals were also born in the same fashion of spontaneous arising. However, there were gender differences apparent between them. If the being has the remnants of the retribution of breaking the third precept, they were born female. If they don't have such retribution or have atoned for any they had, they would be born male. Once animals of different genders start to reproduce together, a new type of birth was initiated that needs gametes from both the male and female. Babies started to be born from eggs and from that time on, all animals were born from eggs rather than being spontaneously arising.

From this point onwards, animals tended to be of smaller types. This began with the higher-level animals which are elephants and horses which were historically older than other types of life like oxen, buffalos, lions, antelope, deer, pigs, dogs, cats, ducks and chickens. Both males and females were born in very large amounts in all of these types of animals. When the level of defilements in the human increased further, smaller animals like ants, termites, mosquitoes and other insects became widespread.

From that point on, there was diversification of animal species. A huge variety of species developed because of human defilements diversified and with it the retribution of those animals. This diversification will continue until we reach the time when the human lifespan reaches it's shortest. The shortest human lifespan is ten years. The animals born at this time will have especially large bodies. Small iguanas of other times will be born as large iguanas at this time. The animals born in this era are not born by spontaneous arising any more.

Instead they are born by sexual reproduction and their ferocity increases as time goes on.

### **Humans Begin to Eat Meat**

The reason that humans begin to eat meat is because those who had come to the human realm from the hell realms brought their angry and aggressive tendencies [*dosacarita*] with them. Because in past lives they had been carnivorous animals, when they become born as humans, they had still not broken free of the temptation to kill for meat. When they met the animals they had been killed by in past lives, the karmic entanglement tempted them to want to kill those animals. In that era, animals were killed by stoning or being beaten with sticks.

At first, such karmic entanglements motivated the people merely to want to kill. It was only later that the thought to eat the flesh from the corpse occurred to them. Once they started eating meat they became addicted to the flavor. Later they started to kill *especially* to obtain flesh to eat – and meat became part of the human diet down to the present day.

As meat eating became more popular some people misunderstood that animals were born merely to be human food. As barter for meat changed to buying and selling, a market grew up for meat and eventually currency to pay for it.

The matters discussed here regarding the evolution of human beings are only referring to those that are born in the world that we live in now, which is called the Rose-Apple continent. Aside from the world we live in, there are still human beings who are born in the other three cosmic continents. They are the Northern Continent, Eastern Continent and Western Continent. Originally, the lifespan of humans that lived in these worlds were very long and lasted an incalculable eon. When the defilements in the minds of humans increased, it made the environment less healthy. This is because the merit that nourishes and supports humans decreased. This merit is originally came from the wholesome actions of humans. Increased defilements thus causes the lifespan of humans to decrease further.

Humans in the Northern Continent have a lifespan that can be reduced to 1,000 years and then it remains constant. Humans that live in the Eastern Continent have a lifespan that can be reduced to 700 years and then it remains constant. And humans that live in the Western Continent have a lifespan that can be reduced to 500 years and then it remains constant. Those humans that live in the Rose-Apple continent have a lifespan that can be reduced to ten years and after it reaches ten years, the lifespan of humans in that continent will increase until it reaches the length of an incalculable eon again. And once it reaches an incalculable eon, it starts to reduce again.

In each universe, there are the same set of four continents. All the universes have the same lifespans as the humans on the Northern, Eastern and Western Continents as a rule and follow the Five Precepts. Everyone thus has a life that

is peaceful and happy. Nevertheless, the Lord Buddha always chooses to be born on the Rose-Apple Continent.

## Conclusion

There have been many changes in our world since, at the very beginning of time, a celestial being came down to eat 'Curds of Earth'. Because of this, he became our world's first human. Since that time, the way humans live has changed to that we know today. The origin of everything begins with the mind of the human itself. Even though scientists have not discovered where humans came from, the Lord Buddha taught us through his teachings that humans did not evolve from animals as scientists assume.

If scientific knowledge is compared to the knowledge of Buddhism, it starts to look like mere fragments of the whole truth. Even Albert Einstein, a scientist in the new era who discovered the Theory of Relativity, still expressed his opinion regarding Buddhism:

“The religion of the future will be a cosmic religion. It should transcend a personal God and avoid dogmas and theology. Covering both the natural and the spiritual, it should be based on a religious sense arising from the experience of all things, natural and spiritual, as a meaningful unity. Buddhism answers this description. If there is any religion that would cope with modern scientific needs, it would be Buddhism.”<sup>10</sup>

The fact the reason the Lord Buddha taught about the universe, the world, humans and even the origin of these things was to divulge the origins of Brahma and the caste system. This teaching was intended to restore joy and pride about having become Buddhist monks, to Vase.t.tha and Bharadvaaja novices. The Lord Buddha did not intend to talk about the origins of the world directly because he did not reckon this knowledge would ever help people rise above suffering. Normally, if anyone asked the Lord Buddha questions concerning the origins of the world he would not answer. Once, there was even one monk who threatened to disrobe if the Buddha didn't answer his questions concerning the origin of the world – even so the Buddha still did not answer this question because he believed that it would not benefit that monk at all. Nevertheless, because the Lord Buddha built up much merit and good deeds so that he can reach his goal of Enlightenment as a Buddha, he knew that he did not want to just have knowledge about things. He wanted to help every being escape suffering. For this reason, he revealed the origin of the world to Vase.t.tha and Bharadvaaja because it was of benefit to them.

In conclusion, when studying cosmology, if we study merely to increase our knowledge, it would not serve any purpose at all, going against the objectives of the Lord Buddha in teaching these materials. However, if we study it and it helps us to become disenchanted with the suffering of the cycle of existence, it will inspire us to strive so that we do not have to return to this cycle of rebirth again. This would be ample reason to study this subject.

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<sup>10</sup> May 19th, 1939, Albert Einstein's speech on "Science and Religion" in Princeton, New Jersey, U.S.A.

# **CHAPTER 5**

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## **Universal Deterioration Caused by Lack of Morality**

## Chapter 5

# Universal Deterioration Caused by Lack of Morality

### Units in this Chapter

- 5.1 The World Has Been Deteriorating since the Beginning
- 5.2 Chronology of Deterioration Events
- 5.3 Deterioration Started **from** the Governor
- 5.4 Appearance of Deterioration in Human Society
- 5.5 Deterioration to the Point of Crisis
- 5.6 The Root of Human Deterioration
- 5.7 Protecting the World and Allowing it to Prosper
- 5.8 Benefits of Understanding Human Prosperity and Deterioration

### Chapter at a Glance

1. Deterioration in the quality of human life was set in motion by the eating of solid food by primeval beings inhabiting the world – an action which led to further alterations in the human and physical environments and consequent worsening of human quality of life. Formerly abundant natural resources became depleted. Discrimination and aggression started to rear their ugly heads.
2. The degradation in human society became more severe when those in power implemented unjust policies – and instead of solving social problems, they were made worse.
3. The deterioration resulted in ignorance of the Tenfold Path of Wholesomeness and peoples' succumbing to the Tenfold Path of Unwholesomeness. Such unwholesome behavior only served to worsen the deterioration humans experienced.
4. Knowing the root causes of deterioration in quality of human life it becomes obvious that wholesome behavior alone can protect the world and lead it to prosperity.

### Chapter Objectives

This unit should give students the knowledge and understanding to be able to:

1. Explain correctly how human behavior can be the root causes of deterioration or prosperity in the world.
2. Describe the karmic outcomes of each form of wholesome and unwholesome action correctly.

## Introduction

From previous chapter, we have learned how the universe and all the things in it are formed by the combination of the four elements (earth, water, fire and the wind) as mentioned in chapter 2. The emergence of components of the universe has been gradual and has taken place over a long period of time. The timescales involved are far beyond the scope of conventional units of time. The fully-formed structure of the universe is as described in chapter 3. Later, after the formation of the universe and the earth, the human beings arose. Originally, human beings arose by the mode of spontaneous arising and had delight rather than solids as their food. No need to consume the touchable food. Later, there was much change. Starting from the moment these original beings ate solid food, their aura disappeared. Male and female gender differences became apparent, they settled down in houses and territories were divided up until the first king was enthroned. This chapter describes how the deterioration of the universe and everything in it has occurred because human behavior has succumbed to the defilements of greed, hatred and delusion.

### 5.1 The World Has Been Deteriorating since the Beginning

According to our definitions, universal deterioration means not only deterioration of the universe, but all the things in it as well. The symptoms of deterioration of the universe don't just become apparent during the 'end-times' of the universe, but start to manifest in small ways right from the first changes that happen at the beginning of history.

Immediately after the structure of the universe had fallen into place, the rate of change (entropy) in the universe was very slight – however, with the arrival of human beings the rate of change was dramatically accelerated – and this has continued down to the present day. Human contact with nature has not only changed nature, but has also rebounded on man to change his quality of life – and on reflection we see that many of these changes have been to the detriment of man and nature alike.

In the beginning when human beings were still Brahmas of Radiant Luster, they had a radiant complexion and a bright aura, did not have to depend on external light, had an ethereal body which transcended gender, could fly and walk in the air, did not have to consume solid food because they were sustained by delight alone. The human beings had long lifespans with very little suffering. However, once these beings had succumbed to the appetizing flavor of the 'curds of Earth', because they could not curb their desire for it, the wheels of deterioration were set in motion for the human and physical environments.

The human beings changed so that their former auras were lost, their bodies lost their radiance, gender differences appeared and with them internal organs (internal organs developed out of the new need to digest solid food), they were unable to float in the air as before and were grounded having to move from place to place on foot.

When the human behaviors changed, physical changes also started to take place in the universe. From empty space, the components of the universal structure started to emerge. The things which already existed disappeared or were reduced or deteriorated in quality and quantity. The sun and the moon appeared, giving their light to the universe. Then came the stars and there started to be a day and a night and a rotation of the seasons. The wind blew and there was heat and cold. The 'curds of Earth' was gradually depleted and was replaced by a coarser food which later disappeared itself.

It is thus apparent that degradation is not something which has just started, but has been happening since the beginning of history – or more precisely, since there started to be human beings in the universe. As soon as humans appeared in the cosmos, the globe started to deteriorate. However, since the deterioration was not obvious, it seemed like only the natural changes as the habitat reached equilibrium. However, on examination of the changes both in human quality of life and the environment Buddhist scriptures tell us that it has been a continuous downturn since the advent of human history. Thus, could say that the world had deteriorated since the beginning.

## **5.2 Chronology of Deterioration Events**

To show how the deterioration has taken place, what follows is a detailed chronology of the prehistorical events already touched on in chapter 4. The first changes to take place were in the human complexion. Complexions became more darkened for those who ate more of the 'curds of Earth' and less darkened in those who ate less. Those of brighter complexion looked down on those of darker complexion, and because of this attitude of discrimination, the 'curds of Earth' vanished and was replaced by a mushroom like food. As the mushrooms were coarser than the 'curds of Earth', their complexion changing correspondingly. The more the human consumed, the more they changed. Differences of complexion exacerbated the discrimination, causing the mushroom-like food to vanish. When the mushroom-like food had disappeared a creeper like food appeared in its place.

Later, as human behavior degraded further wheat appeared in the place of creepers. The wheat had a tall stalk and large grains with no husk. The grains were nutritious and tasted good. The wheat could grow wild, anywhere. When the grains were picked, it would grow back the same as before as many times as it were picked. Although the food was plentiful, the humans grew lazy and did not want to go out picking wheat every day. They picked more than a day's supply and hoarded the excess. Consequently, the wheat degraded to develop chaff. A husk appeared. Once picked, wheat grains no longer grew back and the amount of wheat became scarcer. It no longer grew anywhere – now growing only in clumps. The grains and stalk became smaller in size. The wheat became correspondingly less nutritious and tasty.

The wheat was not as easy to find as before. Therefore, the people divided up territories and made boundaries around them. However, there were some individuals who didn't rely on the wheat grown on their own territories but stole from their neighbors. The thieves were caught and admonished, however when

released, went back to stealing as before. When caught again, they lied denying what they had done. The ensuing arguments and violence led society to have to find a solution to the problem of injustice.

### 5.3 Deterioration Started from the Governor

The people decided to select a governor to be responsible for the meting out of justice to the wrongdoers. From then on, human society was governed by a king. Some such governors had sufficient merit and power and became Universal Monarchs who governed the land justly by Buddhist virtues. Such a monarch ruled over all four cosmic continents and were endowed with seven treasures: the wheel treasure, the elephant treasure, the horse treasure, the crystal treasure, the woman treasure, the treasurer treasure and the minister treasure. He overcame his foes merely by his presence.

A certain Universal Monarch named Da.lhanemi<sup>1</sup> reigned until he noticed that his wheel treasure had slipped from its usual place (indicating that the merit he needed to rule justly had been exhausted) so he abdicated in favor of his son and renounced the world, becoming a hermit who lived in the forest. Seven days later, the wheel treasure disappeared altogether. To cause the wheel treasure to return the hermit advised the new king to practice the virtues of a Universal Monarch [*cakkavatti-vatta*], namely:

1. To rule the land justly, protecting both human and animal life – not allowing injustice to take place in his kingdom.
2. To disburse wealth to those in need.
3. To request teaching from well-practicing monks or Brahmins as to what constitutes wholesomeness or unwholesomeness, actions to be done, actions to be avoided, actions which are for benefit and happiness and actions that are for harm and suffering. On the basis of these teachings, to act only in accordance with what is wholesome and to shun unwholesomeness.

The son listened to the father's words and acted accordingly. The wheel treasure reappeared. Using the wheel treasure he was able to travel to all the four cosmic continents and was able to reign over all of them justly at the invitation of the kings of each continent. On each continent he instructed the assembled citizens:

- “ Not to kill living beings.”
- “ Not take what is not given.”
- “ Not to commit adultery.”
- “ Not tell lies.”
- “ Not to drink alcohol.”

And allowed the king of that continent to reign as before under his dominion. Thus, the Five Precepts are nothing new to our time. They are what has ensured peace and harmony in the world long before the Buddhism. The Buddha did not make up the Precepts – they are a long established tradition of the Universal

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<sup>1</sup> Cakkavatti Sutta D.iii.58



Monarchs. For as long as a Universal Monarch existed on Earth, he would teach his subjects to observe the Five Precepts. For as long as the people kept the Five Precepts, peace and happiness would prevail – and there would be no threat of aggression.

A further six generations of Universal Monarchs followed his example. When the seventh in the line of Universal Monarchs saw that the wheel treasure had shifted from its position, he became a hermit and told his son to carry on the traditions of a Universal Monarch. Seven days later, the wheel treasure vanished completely. The son who took the throne, merely mourned the disappearance of the wheel treasure, without going to seek instruction from his father as to the practices of the Universal Monarch. He ruled his kingdom instead by trial and error.

#### **5.4 Appearance of Deterioration in Human Society**

As a result of the omission in his conduct, the kingdom did not enjoy the prosperity it had done under the previous monarchs. Later, his ministers informed the king of the probable reason for hardship in their kingdom and urged him to learn about the practices of a Universal Monarch from others who could remember them. He was able to learn the details of the practice of a Universal Monarch in this way – but he did not put *all* of them into practice. He made sure no injustice took place in his kingdom, but he omitted to donate supplies to the needy. In the absence of help, poverty abounded and consequently theft became widespread. When the thieves were arrested they claimed that they had only stolen because they had no other way of procuring wealth. Only then did the king donate supplies to them, in the hope they would earn a proper living instead of thieving.

When others learned that the king had donated preferentially to thieves, they too resorted to stealing in the hope of getting royal support. The king realized that if he continued with this policy, theft would soon be rife in his kingdom. Instead he punished those thieves by shaving off their hair, tying them up to be paraded in public, then executing them and impaling their head on a stake. When the thieves found out the punishment for stealing had been increased to the death penalty, they sharpened their weapons, and cut off the heads of the people they stole from. Murder became rife in the kingdom.

Since the punishment for stealing was the death penalty, if suspects were arrested and questioned, they would tell lie denying their involvement. Lying thus became widespread. The main reason for all the killing, stealing and lying in the kingdom was the fact that the king had not practiced the conduct of a Universal Monarch since the beginning by donating to the needy.

As the killing of animals and humans became rife, together with telling lies, the human lifespan became shorter. Peoples' complexions lost their radiance further. With the deterioration of lifespan and complexion in the first generation, those of the second generation were affected more heavily still. The children with a lifespan of parents with a lifespan of 80,000 years old would have a lifespan of only 40,000 years. When this generation with a lifespan of only 40,000 years

continued with their stealing and lies, their own children were left with a lifespan of only 20,000 years.

When the human lifespan was reduced to 20,000 years, various people resorted to divisive speech. When caught for stealing thieves would malign others accusing them of theft too. Due to the further compromises to their self-discipline, the human complexion and lifespan deteriorated further. The following generation was left with a lifespan of only 10,000 years and their complexions worsened leaving some with better complexions and some worse. Those with darker complexions regarded the others with suspicion and committed adultery with others' wives.

As a result of the increasing toll of bad karma done by the humans the next generation born had a lifespan reduced to 5,000 years. When two further sorts of unwholesome behavior that became widespread in the human population were harsh speech (swearing) and idle chatter reducing the lifespan of the next generation to only 2,000-2,500 years.

With this 2,000 year lifespan generation, covetousness and vengeance became widespread in human society and aggression became more common. Lifespan and the complexion deteriorated further. Lifespan was reduced to 1,000 years and with that generation False View became widespread. Lifespan and complexion deteriorated further leaving the next generation with a lifespan of only 500 years. The 500 year lifespan generation saw the emergence of a further three vices in society grasping for the unvirtuous [*adhamma-raaga*] greed without end [*visama-lobha*] and passion of unnatural intensity [*micchaa-dhamma*]. Lifespan and complexion deteriorated further leaving the next generation with a lifespan of only 200-250 years.

With the 250 year lifespan generation, society degraded to the point where people no longer cherished their parents, elders, monks or ascetics.

## **5.5 Deterioration to the Point of Crisis**

Since the human beings succumbed to more and more unwholesome behaviors, and less and less wholesome behaviors, lifespan and complexion continued to deteriorate until ten years was all that remained of the human lifespan. People would come of marriageable age at five. The best remaining delicacies left at that time – ghee, honey, molasses and salt – were completely exhausted. The best food remaining was '*kusa* grass' – the equivalent, of wheat, rice or meat in the present time.

In this era, not one of the tenfold path of wholesomeness remained, the whole of society having plunged into the tenfold path of unwholesomeness. No one cherished their parents, elders, monks or ascetics any longer – and those who neglected these things were praised by society. People didn't know the difference between wholesomeness or unwholesomeness any more. People were preoccupied by things not for enlightenment [*asaddhamma*] and were indiscriminate about who they 'mated' with -- be it their parents, brothers or

sisters, the relatives, friends, students or teachers. Their sexuality was no different from that of animals.

Besides indiscriminate sexual intercourse the humans of that era were also violent and cruel towards each other, hunting each other down like prey -- be it their parents, brothers or sisters, the relatives, friends, students or teachers. It ended with a seven day holocaust known as the '*satthantarakappa*'. The human population all killed one another excepting for a group a group who fled into the forests, valleys or islands with the thought, "May we not kill others and may others not kill us!" In the wilderness, they survived on roots and the fruits in the forest for food. Once the seven day holocaust was over, they came out of hiding. When they hugged one another, realizing that the deterioration had happened because of the human deterioration into unwholesome behavior. Henceforth, they persuaded each other to be established in wholesomeness and refrain from killing. As they did more and more wholesome deeds, generation by generation their lifespan and complexion improved. The offspring of that generation had a lifespan of twenty years. The new generation did more wholesome deeds than there forefathers, and their lifespan and complexion improved accordingly.

## 5.6 The Root of Human Deterioration

Since the deterioration in human society occurred progressively according to the order described, and it was primarily human beings on the receiving end of the suffering from the deterioration. All people had some degree of defilements in their mind – but their ability to achieve success depended on their awareness of their defilements – and if aware of them, whether they took action to get rid of them or not. If they did not try to overcome their defilements, they would just be puppets to the evil influences in their minds. If they were thick with defilements they would succumb to the greed, hatred and delusion in their minds.

Since people were controlled by their defilements, they tended to do unwholesome things. Their unwholesome behavior set in motion ever widening circles of deterioration. From the chronology of deterioration that took place in the Cakkavatti Sutta, the sequence of downturn in unwholesomeness is shown all the way down to the time when both people and the environment suffered serious consequences.

After the king did not perform the duties of a Universal Monarch as his predecessors had done, the first unwholesome behaviour people resorted to was stealing [*adinnadaana*]. The next unwholesome behaviours they resorted to were killing [*paa.naatipaata*], telling lies [*musaavaada*], divisive speech [*pisu.navaacaa*], adultery [*kaamesumicchacaara*], harsh speech [*pharusavaacaa*] and idle chatter [*samphapplaapa*], covetousness [*abhijhaa*], vengefulness [*byaapaada*] and False View [*micchaa-di.t.thi*].

Besides lapsing into the Tenfold Path of Unwholesomeness, the next thing that the humans succumbed to grasping for the unvirtuous [*adhamma-raaga*], greed without end [*visama-lobha*] and passion of unnatural intensity [*micchaa-dhamma*]. When three kinds of attitude became widespread, society degraded to the point

where people no longer cherished their parents, teachers, elders, monks or ascetics.

From that time onwards, down to the time when the lifespan was reduced to ten years, the human no longer had any more respect for their parents, teachers, elders, monks or ascetics. They mated indiscriminately like animals. Finally, they became aggressive and cruel, hunting each other down like prey.

The particular human behaviors which led to the deterioration of the world are referred to in Buddhism called the Tenfold Path of Unwholesomeness. This was the karma which eventually led to deterioration, suffering and eventually the Unfortunate realms. The Tenfold Path of Unwholesomeness can be categorized according to the three modes of action – that of body, speech and mind:

**Unwholesome bodily actions** consists of:

1. Killing [*paa.naatipaata*] of the human beings, animals and even committing suicide.
2. Stealing [*adinnadaana*] of taking things not given.
3. Sexual misconduct [*kaamesumicchacaara*] namely committing adultery and all other sorts of sexual relations outside marriage.

**Unwholesome speech** consists of:

1. Telling lies [*musaavaada*].
2. Divisive speech [*pisu.naavaacaa*].
3. Harsh speech [*pharusavaacaa*].
4. Idle chatter [*samphaplaapa*].

**Unwholesome thought** consists of:

1. Covetousness [*abhijhaa*].
2. Vengefulness [*byapaada*].
3. False View [*micchaa di.t.thi*].

**False View** consists of the following ten attitudes which conflict with reality concerning life and the world, namely the understandings that:

1. Sharing is superfluous.
2. Welfare work is superfluous.
3. Virtue doesn't need to be honored.
4. Good and bad deeds have no karmic results.
5. The 'world' doesn't really exist.
6. There is no life after death.
7. We are not indebted to our mother.
8. We are not indebted to our father.
9. Spontaneous arising beings don't exist.
10. Wise enlightened beings don't exist.

From the point when the human population succumbed to False View, they closed themselves to all wholesomeness, everyone succumbed to grasping for the unvirtuous [*adhamma-raaga*], greed without end [*visama-lobha*] and passion of unnatural intensity [*micchaa-dhamma*]. Society degraded to the point where people no longer cherished their parents, elders, monks or ascetics – and this went further to the point where there was indiscriminate mating and eventually indiscriminate killing.

The ten kinds of False View obscured any true knowledge or understanding to the human population and as a result they covering not believing in sharing, welfare, virtue, karmic retribution, the debt of gratitude to their parents or life after death. They consequently lacked any conscience about their actions and became fully puppet to the power of their defilements bringing the almost complete fall of the human race.

### Deterioration of Human Lifespan

Average Age (Years)	Causes
From 80,000 to 40,000	Killing, stealing and telling lies
From 40,000 to 20,000	Killing, stealing and telling lies deliberately
From 20,000 to 10,000	Killing, stealing and telling lies deliberately and divisive speech
From 10,000 to 5,000	Killing, stealing and telling lies deliberately, divisive speech and adultery
From 5,000 to 2,500-2,000	Killing, stealing and telling lies deliberately, divisive speech and adultery, harsh speech and idle chatter
From 2,000-2,500 to 1,000	Killing, stealing and telling lies deliberately, divisive speech and adultery, harsh speech and idle chatter, covetousness and vengefulness
From 1,000 to 500	Killing, stealing and telling lies deliberately, divisive speech and adultery, harsh speech and idle chatter, covetousness and vengefulness and False View
From 500 to 200-250	Killing, stealing and telling lies deliberately, divisive speech and adultery, harsh speech and idle chatter, covetousness and vengefulness and False View grasping for the unvirtuous, greed without end and passion of unnatural intensity.
From 200-250 to 100	Killing, stealing and telling lies deliberately, divisive speech and adultery, harsh speech and idle chatter, covetousness and vengefulness and False View grasping for the unvirtuous, greed without end and passion of unnatural intensity and no longer cherishing their parents, elders, monks or ascetics.
From 100 to 10	Killing, stealing and telling lies deliberately, divisive speech and adultery, harsh speech and idle chatter, covetousness and vengefulness and False View grasping for the unvirtuous, greed without end and passion of unnatural intensity and no longer cherishing their parents, elders, monks or ascetics, complete disappearance of the Tenfold Path of Wholesomeness and prospering of the Tenfold Path of Unwholesomeness.
From 100 to 7 days	Deterioration into indiscriminate mating and killing [ <i>Migasa~n~nii</i> Period].

## 5.7 Protecting the World and Allowing it to Prosper

As already mentioned, when human lifespan was reduced to ten years, a seven day long holocaust happened whereby people hunted each other down indiscriminately -- treating each other no better than deer hunted for venison. They used weapons against each other such as bricks, sticks, blades – inflicting mortal wounds – until the majority of the human population were dead. However, a certain minority fled the holocaust – surviving it. In the aftermath, they realized the deterioration had derived from unwholesome human behaviour. Hence, they persuaded one another to do only wholesome deeds from then on thereby increasing human prosperity and lifespan. Wholesome behaviours increased now with each new generation and lifespan increased correspondingly. Eventually human beings worked their way up to a lifespan of an ‘incalculable’ year. The environment also improved. The wholesome behaviour of the human population consisted specifically of a Tenfold path of wholesomeness which can be divided amongst the three modes of action as follows– that of body, speech and mind:

**Wholesome bodily actions** consist of:

1. Abstaining from killing [*paa.naatipaata*] of the human beings, animals and even committing suicide.
2. Abstaining from stealing [*adinnadaana*] of taking things not given.
3. Abstaining from sexual misconduct [*kaamesumicchacaara*] namely committing adultery and all other sorts of sexual relations outside marriage.

**Wholesome speech** consists of:

1. Abstaining from telling lies [*musaavaada*].
2. Abstaining from divisive speech [*pisu.naavaacaa*].
3. Abstaining from harsh speech [*pharusavaacaa*].
4. Abstaining from idle chatter [*samphaplaapa*].

**Wholesome thought** consists of:

1. Abstaining from covetousness [*abhijhaa*].
2. Abstaining from vengefulness [*byaapaada*].
3. Right View [*micchaa di.t.thi*].

**Right View** consists of the following ten attitudes which confirm with reality concerning life and the world, namely the understandings that:

1. Sharing is desirable.
2. Welfare work is necessary.
3. Virtue should be honored.
4. Good and bad deeds have karmic results.
5. The real existence of the ‘world’.
6. There is life after death.
7. We are indebted to our mother.
8. We are indebted to our father.

9. Spontaneous arising beings exist.
10. Wise enlightened beings exist.

As a result of the increased wholesomeness of human behavior, the environment gradually improved. The world flourished and was peaceful. The human lifespan extended, especially as the result of Right View allowing the people to understand the reality of life and world which in turn encouraged them to do yet more good deeds.

## **5.8 Benefits of Understanding Human Prosperity and Deterioration**

In recent years, material progress has been making more and more effect on our lives. However, such material progress has been matched by a downturn in spiritual and moral standards in the society. Serious forms of moral depravity have become the norm – while people overtly encourage their friends to go out on drinking binges, they have to be secretive about going to the temple or taking up spiritual pursuits. Therefore, having an awareness of what is behind human prosperity or deterioration can inevitably assist us to make the choices in our behavior which will be for the prosperity of society:

1. We should restrict ourselves to wholesome behavior from this day forth because any good fortune we experience at the present time must come from meritorious deeds we did in the past – and that merit will eventually run out. Thus, we should be quick to top up on meritorious deeds, in the short time available, so that we can become habituated to them in every future lifetime.
2. We should abstain definitively from any form of unwholesome behavior realizing the many forms of disastrous retribution coming to oneself one's fellow man and the physical environment.
3. We cannot stand idle without doing additional good deeds, because aside of not getting any further 'interest' on the good deeds we have done in the past, we are eating into the 'capital'.
4. We must use our body to the full whether we are physically healthy or not – because unlike the body of an animal, the human body is adept and able to cultivate all sorts of meritorious deeds for itself.

Thus a clear understanding about how our own behavior affects the prosperity and the deterioration of humankind will help us to strive for prosperity which will ultimately allow us to fulfill the supreme human goal of attaining Nirvana.

Because ignorance is at the heart of our human condition we tend to lack answers to the eternal questions of life such as where we have come from, our purpose in life and where we go when we die. Such a condition remains with us for as long as we fail to meet up with someone possessed of the true knowledge which will allow a person to break free of the cycle of existence. The best of such Good Friends [*kalyaa.namitta*] is the Lord Buddha, through whom we can know our real aim in life. Although the Lord Buddha himself may not be alive any longer, but the legacy of his teachings are still alive in our era. Furthermore, still in

existence is the community of monks who continue to propagate the Buddha's teachings to the world. The characteristics of a Good Friend such as the Buddha who leads the world towards prosperity is compared below to the characteristics of a fool who lead the world towards destruction:

### A Comparison of the Fool and Good Friend's Characteristics

The Characteristic of the Fool	The Characteristic of the Good Friend
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Immoral action<sup>2</sup>.</li> <li>2. Immoral speech.</li> <li>3. Immoral thought.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Moral action.</li> <li>2. Moral speech.</li> <li>3. Moral thought.</li> </ol>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Evil thought<sup>3</sup>.</li> <li>2. Evil speech.</li> <li>3. Evil action.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Virtuous thought.</li> <li>2. Virtuous speech.</li> <li>3. Virtuous action.</li> </ol>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Not realizing one's own errors<sup>4</sup>.</li> <li>2. Not apologizing for one's mistakes.</li> <li>3. Not forgiving others who apologize to one for their mistakes.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Realizing one's own errors.</li> <li>2. Apologizing for one's mistakes.</li> <li>3. Forgiving others who apologize to one for their mistakes.</li> </ol>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Asking questions without skilful reflection<sup>5</sup>.</li> <li>2. Answering questions without skilful reflection.</li> <li>3. Harbor dislike of others who answer questions only after skilful reflection.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Asking questions with skilful reflection.</li> <li>2. Answering questions with skilful reflection</li> <li>3. Not harboring a dislike of others who answer questions only after skilful reflection</li> </ol>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Unwholesome action<sup>6</sup></li> <li>2. Unwholesome speech</li> <li>3. Unwholesome thought</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Wholesome action</li> <li>2. Wholesome speech</li> <li>3. Wholesome thought</li> </ol>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Harmful action<sup>7</sup></li> <li>2. Harmful speech</li> <li>3. Harmful thought</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Harmless action</li> <li>2. Harmless speech</li> <li>3. Harmless thought</li> </ol>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Aggressive action<sup>8</sup></li> <li>2. Aggressive speech</li> <li>3. Aggressive thought</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Non-aggressive action</li> <li>2. Non-aggressive speech</li> <li>3. Non-aggressive thought</li> </ol>

From the table above, we can conclude that the world prospers or decays as a result of human behavior. The quality of peoples' behavior depends to a large extent on the persuasive example of Good Friends in society who know the proper aim in life to Pursue Perfection in order to attain Nirvana. Thus we should strive in accordance with the four types of Right Effort exhorted by the Lord

<sup>2</sup> Lakkha.na Sutta A.i.102

<sup>3</sup> Cinta Sutta A.i.102

<sup>4</sup> Accaya Sutta A.i.103

<sup>5</sup> Ayoniso Sutta A.i.103

<sup>6</sup> Akusala Sutta A.i.103

<sup>7</sup> Saavajja Sutta A.i.104

<sup>8</sup> Sabyaapajja Sutta A.i.104



Buddha:<sup>9</sup>

1. Not doing evils which you never did before [*sa.mvarapadhaana*].
2. Overcoming evil habits you already possess [*pahaanapadhaana*].
3. Doing good deeds you never did before [*bhaavanaapadhaana*].
4. Maintaining the good habits you already possess [*anurakkhaapadhaana*].

Since we may have to be reborn in many future lifetimes in order to accrue all thirty forms of Perfection, it is necessary to learn profoundly about the nature of life and the world. One world cycle is very long time – nonetheless, we are only able to accrue merits during one quadrant of the world cycle – which again means we have limited opportunity.

## Conclusion

Our human aim in life is to pursue perfection in order to attain Nirvana – which means doing only wholesome deeds to bring prosperity to life and the world. However, whenever people forget their real aim in life, their behaviours succumb to unwholesomeness and they amount an increasing toll of bad karma and causing them to be stuck in the cycle of existence.

From a study of Buddhism we learn that the number of past Buddhas who have entered Nirvana, are more numerous than all the grains of sand in the sea. It has also been more than 2,500 years since our own Buddha entered Nirvana. Even so, we personally seem no closer to breaking free of the cycle of existence! This is because Right View in our own minds is still not steadfast. Also, there have been many factors to make us overlook the suffering of birth, old-age, sickness and death. When we erred into unwholesome behavior unaware of the consequences, our human body has deteriorated, our complexion worsened and our lifespan foreshortened.

After death, in the unfortunate realms one must undergo the retribution of all the bad karma one had done while alive for a long time. It is very difficult to go back to being born human again. Even when reborn in the human realm, the remnants of one's past retribution will still impede one's efforts to do good deeds by forcing on us impediments like poverty, dumbness, sickness and curtailed life. It is only when one has the chance to meet up with a Good Friend and to instill Right View firmly in the mind that one will have sufficiently strong mindfulness to continue doing virtuous deeds in spite of circumstances that tempt one otherwise.

Thus, with a full awareness of the reality of life and the world, while have Good Friends on hand it will start to occur to us that there is really nothing new in this world. We have already been born here countless times without finding anything either pleasurable or bringing true happiness. Thus it is only right that we should not hesitate to cultivate the maximum of meritorious deeds in order to escape completely from the uncertainty of rebirth in the cycle of existence.

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<sup>9</sup> Mahaa-satipa.t.thaana Sutta D.ii.290ff.

# **CHAPTER 6**

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## **Eschatology of the Universe**

## Chapter 6

### Eschatology of the Universe

#### Units in this Chapter

#### 6.1 Cause of the Ending of the Universe

#### 6.2 Agent of World Destruction Depends on the Human Mind

#### 6.3 Scope of Destruction by Fire, Water and Wind

6.3.1 The Destruction by Fire

6.3.2 The Destruction by Water

6.3.3 The Destruction by Wind

#### 6.4 Process Destruction of the universe

6.4.1 Process of Destruction by Fire

6.4.2 Process of Destruction by Water

6.4.3 Process of Destruction by Wind

#### 6.5 Why the Buddha Taught Eschatology

#### Chapter at a Glance

1. The world will eventually be destroyed by fire, water or wind depending on the predominant mental defilements of the human community. If the human community possesses excessive anger, the world will be destroyed by the fire. If a human community possesses excessive desire, the world will be destroyed by water. If the human community possesses excessive delusion, the world will be destroyed by wind.
2. The extent of damage to the thirty-one realms varies at the end of the world depending on whether the world is destroyed by water, fire or wind. Also, there is an order to the type of destruction bringing the world to an end. Normally, the world is destroyed by water, but every eighth time, it will be destroyed by fire. Finally, in the last (64<sup>th</sup>) time, it will be destroyed by wind.
3. The method of surviving the destruction of the world is to practice meditation until attaining the absorptions in order to be born in a realm outside the area of destruction. However, for complete security, one would best rid oneself of all defilements to avoid any further rebirth.

#### Chapter Objectives

Students will gain the knowledge and understanding to be able to:

1. Explain correctly the reason why the world is brought to an end by fire, water or wind.

2. Demonstrate the sequence with which fire, water or wind bring the world to an end in successive world cycles and the extent of the damage to the cosmos for each agent of destruction.
3. Explain methods of surviving the end of the world for themselves and others.

## **Introduction**

In the previous chapters, we have already learned about the structure and location of the various realms – their nature and inhabitants. Also from chapter 5, we know about the origins of the universe, the earth, the stars, human beings and all other things. We know how evolution took place, and how it affected the lifespans of the world and the universe.

This chapter will explain the various kinds of way the earth and the universe can come to an end (eschatology).

### **6.1 Causes of the Ending of the Universe**

In our present day world, we have become used to the idea that if the world ends, it will be because of weapons of mass destruction. However, from the Buddhist point of view there are only three things which can end the world, namely fire, water or wind.

We might be familiar with these three elements but, we might still not understand how fire could burn up the whole world. Even when terrorists set fire to several oil wells -- considered one of the world's severest fires – still the Earth is left intact. The world was not burned up by it. It is also hard for us to understand how floods or gales could destroy the earth from what we have seen of conventional floods or hurricanes.

This is because the fire, water and wind capable of destroying the world is of a completely different magnitude to that we have experienced. The fire which brings the world to an end at the end of the eon is bastioned by the retribution of all the bad karma of the beings remaining on the world -- especially the human beings -- because other animals could not perform much karma – most of them are just using up the retribution that was the result of the karma they had done while a human in the past. Similarly, the angels and the Brahmas in the heavens don't have much chance to make new karma because they are just using up the fruits of the good deeds they had done as a human in the past.

Those born in the unfortunate realms – whether in the major hells, the purgatories, as hungry ghosts, monster or animals are mostly using up the retribution that was the result of the karma they had done while a human in the past. Thus, there was no chance to do additional unwholesome karma. It is only the humans who have the freewill to think, speak and act intentionally. Although given ample opportunity and freedom to think, speak and act in a wholesome way, many had chosen instead to do demeritorious acts. When the evil of their

deeds accumulated more and more the collective retribution of the karma would bring the world to an end.

## 6.2 Agent of World Destruction Depends on the Human Mind

Although the agents of world destruction, fire, water or wind are the most destructive of all influences – only one of the three is responsible for the end of the world on any one occasion, not all three – for example if the world ends by fire, then it is by fire alone.

That any of these agents can destroy the world could only happen because the human mind had become full of defilements. If the human mind had become full of hatred, the world would be destroyed by the fire. If the human mind had become overrun by desire, the earth would be destroyed by water. If the human mind had been filled with delusion, the planet would be ended by wind.

With such knowledge we have a choice about how we wanted the world to end. If we become preoccupied by desire, by being selfish, the earth will end by flood. If we become preoccupied by hatred, indulge in aggression and anger, the earth will end by fire. If we become preoccupied by delusion, ignoring the law of karma, dismissing merit and demerit, the earth will end by wind. However, if want the world to be safe and was not devastated by anything, we ought to help all human beings throughout the world by not letting ourselves or others be overcome by the three groups of defilements.

**Chart 6.2**

### ***The Destruction of the World***

Agents of destruction	Predominant Defilement
Fire	Hatred
Water	Greed
Wind	Delusion

The world will not be destroyed at the same time by all three elements – it can be destroyed by only one at a time. There is a sequence to the elements responsible for bringing the world to an end. Normally, the world is destroyed by water, but every eighth time, it will be destroyed by fire. Finally, in the last (64<sup>th</sup>) time, it will be destroyed by wind. After that, the world and the universe would be reformed. And the earth would be devastated again without an end.

In conclusion, in one world cycle, that the world will be destroyed by fire fifty-six times, the water seven times and the wind one final time.

### 6.3 Scope of Destruction by Fire, Water and Wind

The extent of damage to the thirty-one realms varies at the end of the world depending on whether the world is destroyed by water, fire or wind:

**6.3.1 The Destruction by Fire:** Destruction by fire results in the destruction of *fourteen* realms, namely:

1. The four unfortunate realms: the major hells, the hungry ghost realm, the monster realm and the animal realm.
2. The human realm.
3. The six heaven realms.
4. Three Brahma realms of the first absorption.

**6.3.2 The Destruction by Water:** Destruction by water results in the destruction of *seventeen* realms, namely:

1. The four unfortunate realms: the major hells, the hungry ghost realm, the monster realm and the animal realm.
2. The human realm.
3. The six heaven realms.
4. Three Brahma realms of the first absorption.
5. The three Brahma realms of the second absorption.

**6.3.3 The Destruction by Wind:** Destruction by water results in the destruction of *twenty* realms, namely:

1. The four unfortunate realms: the major hells, the hungry ghost realm, the monster realm and the animal realm.
2. The human realm.
3. The six heaven realms.
4. Three Brahma realms of the first absorption.
5. The three Brahma realms of the second absorption.
6. The three Brahma realms of the third absorption.

**Chart 6.3*****Scope of Destruction by the Fire, the Water and the Wind***

The Realm of neither Perception nor Non-Perception The Realm of Nothingness The Realm of Infinite Consciousness The Realm of Infinite Space  The Realm of the Supreme Brahmas The Realm of Brahmas Who are Clear-Sighted The Realm of Beautiful Brahmas The Realm of Serene Brahmas The Realm of Brahmas Who Do Not Fall from Prosperity  Brahmas with Abundant Rewards      Non-Percipient Beings		
Brahmas with Limited Aura    Brahmas with Infinite Aura    Brahmas with Steady Aura		
Brahmas of Limited Luster    Brahmas of Infinite Luster    Brahmas of Radiant Luster		
Great Brahmas' Attendants    Brahmas' Ministers    Great Brahmas		
The Heaven of the Gods who Lord over the Creation of Others The Heaven of the Gods who Rejoice in Their Own Creations <b><u>FIRE</u></b> <b><u>WATER</u></b> <b><u>WIND</u></b> The Heaven of the Satisfied Gods The Heaven of the Yaamaa Gods The Heaven of the Thirty-Three The Heaven of the Four Great Kings		
Human Realm		
Major Hells    Hungry Ghosts    Monsters    Animals		

**6.4 Process Destruction of the Universe****6.4.1 Process Destruction by Fire**

When the world comes to an end by the fire, it begins with severe and extended drought. The world becomes parched and the trees dry-up and die. Later, two suns appear in the sky. There is no more day or night any more because the world is illuminated from two sides at once.

The new sun is hotter than the original sun. Since the second sun arises through the power of the collective negative karma of the human population, there is no guardian angel of the sun – like Suriya who watches over the original sun (which did not arise in retribution for human karma). Due to the tremendously increase of temperature, the guardian angel for the original sun could no longer fulfill his duty. He meditated urgently to attain the absorptions and escaped to be born in the high Brahma realms beyond the extent of the world's destruction.

With the appearance of two suns in the sky, the temperature on Earth increase to the point that there would be neither cloud nor mist. The water in the pools dried up. The only remaining water was to be found was in the five rivers of the Ganges, the Yamunaa, the Aciravadii, the Mahii and the Sarabhuvu. Survival in human form was no longer possible. Those able to meditate before they burned up were reborn in the Brahma realms.

The humans knew 100,000 years in advance that the world would be destroyed because angels known as '*Lokabyuha*' angels clad in red would announce that in 100,000 years the human world, all beings, the six heaven realms and the Brahma realms of the first absorption would all be destroyed. They warned all humans not to be reckless but to be quick to accomplish meritorious deeds to be born in realms beyond the extent of the destruction.

After the angelic announcement all humankind felt a sense of urgency. They cultivated wholesomeness and meditated until attaining the absorptions – allowing them to be born in the Brahma realms. The angels and Brahmas of the lower realms also meditated with urgency in order to be reborn in safety realms. When the animals in the unfortunate realms exhausted their retribution and were able to be born as human beings, knowing of the angelic announcement, they performed meritorious deeds and meditated with urgency. The remainder were those of False View who did not rush to do good deeds. When the world came to an end, these latter were reborn in an equivalent realm of another universe which had not yet been destroyed.

After a long period of time, a third sun appeared in the sky. With the increased heat, all the water remaining in the five rivers evaporated. Next, a fourth sun appeared. The extreme temperature caused even the large pools of snow-melt in the Himavanta Forest to dry up completely. The water in the cosmic ocean started to evaporate.

After that, a fifth sun appeared in the sky. The water in the oceans dried up completely. When a sixth sun appeared in the sky, the heat caused the water element in the land and mountains to disappear completely. It could not maintain its former condition and became dust wafting around the world.

Subsequently, a seventh sun appeared in the sky with a heat so infinite it set fire to the whole of a large cluster of universes [*tisahassimahassii-lokadhaata*] at once. The tumult of the explosion echoed throughout the cosmos. The summit of Mount Sumeru where the two lowest levels of heaven are located broke off, crumbled and vanished in the air.

The flame that burned and destroyed this earth and universe emanated from the human realm. It then spread quickly to successive levels of heaven and to the Brahma realms of the first absorption. The fire would continue to burn for a very long time until there was nothing left. Only then would the fire start to extinguish in this Brahma realm. After the fire burned out, all that was left of the rest of the universe was empty space and darkness engulfed the universe for a very long time.



#### **6.4.2 Process Destruction by Water**

When the universe is destroyed by water, there is no second sun appearing in the sky. There is only one sun as before. The destruction begins with the occurrence of an acid cloud. Acid rain falls from the cloud, so corrosive that it melts all objects it touches – and it continues to rain in this way without cease. Firstly, it rains in droplets. Later, the rain falls more heavily in larger and larger drops until it is a torrent. The water level rises until it floods the land, the mountains, and covers the whole world, the universe and the large cluster of universes.

The water corrodes all the realms until there is nothing left of the things submerged under it – leaving nothing of the heavens, the Brahma realms of the first and second absorptions and stopping short only of the Brahma levels of the third absorption.

Once everything had been eaten away to leave nothing, the acidic water would recede and disappear leaving only empty space and darkness engulfing the universe for a very long time.

#### **6.4.3 Process Destruction by Wind**

When the universe is destroyed by wind, there is no second sun appearing in the sky. There is only one sun as before. The destruction is caused entirely by wind. In the beginning it starts as a breeze but grows stronger. It starts just by kicking up dust, but later blows away sand, pebbles eventually stones. It grows stronger until it rips up trees, blows down houses and buildings which are carried away in the air.

By the tremendous force of the wind the debris is smashed to pieces, is dispersed and disappears.

Later, the wind starts to arise from *beneath* the land. The severity of the wind flicks the land upside down and blows it away in the air. Whether it be the mountains, rivers, seas and oceans, all things are carried away by the wind and smashed up, and scattered by the strength of the wind strength which tears everything down destructively.

Once the world has been torn to pieces, the objects in the universe start to suffer. Even Mount Sumeru is torn up by the wind, crushed and dissipated without trace. The different levels of the heavens and cosmoses collide with one another until they are reduced to smithereens. The Brahma realms up to the level of the third absorption are entirely destroyed by the wind.

When all things were completely ruined, the wind then abates. There remains only empty space and darkness engulfing the universe for a very long time.

## 6.5 Why the Buddha Taught Eschatology

The reason that the Buddha illustrated the world destruction was not his purpose to frighten anyone, or to predict the end of the world, or even to show his knowledge about eschatology. However, his goal in explaining the destruction of the world was to foster our disenchantment with the world and with being reborn in the cycle of existence for which it is hard to find a beginning or an end.

Although the realms may seem pleasurable, nothing is certain. Nobody is able to possess anything for ever. No one can hang on to their dearest thing without eventually being separated from it. In time, everything decays or dies. It is impermanent. Whether we like something or not, eventually we have to be separated from it. Consequently, if we have to die and be reborn again, we face suffering without end.

That's why the Buddha explained the world destruction to bring us disenchantment with the world and inspire us to seek the liberation:<sup>1</sup>

“O! Monks! The body is impermanent, unstable and unpleasant. This is its nature. One should be disenchanted with it. One should reach dispassion concerning it. One should liberate oneself from being enamored with looks. O! Monks! Mount Sineru is 84,000 leagues in length and 84,000 leagues in width. It is rooted 84,000 leagues into the ocean and rises 84,000 leagues above it. At a certain time, there will be no rain for many years, hundred of years, thousand of years and hundred thousand of years. When it does not rain, the plants, trees and grass – even the huge forest dries up. Even so is the body destroyed, because it is of a nature of impermanence, instability and unpleasantness. One should be disenchanted with it. One should reach dispassion concerning it. One should liberate oneself.

O! Monks! After a certain time a second sun appears. All rivers and canals will dry up. As there is no water . . . even so is the body destroyed . . . one should liberate oneself.

O! Monks! After a certain time a third sun appeared. When the third sun appeared, the great rivers, such as the Ganges, the Yamunaa, the Aciravadii, the Mahii and the Sarabhuvu dried up. When there was no water. O! Monks! . . . even so is the body destroyed . . . one should liberate oneself.”

The Buddha disclosed that the nature of the world, the universe and all beings is to be completely destroyed when the seventh sun appears in the sky and in order that we be disenchanted, dispassionate and liberate ourselves. He also said that even if we were born as a the king of heaven, a Brahma or an emperor, one cannot go beyond suffering for as long as we have not become enlightened, do not understand noble self-discipline, noble concentration, noble

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<sup>1</sup> Suriya Sutta A.iv.100

wisdom and noble liberation clearly. If anyone comprehended all four of these accomplishments, would be as good as enlightened because they can overcome craving and thereby break free of rebirth – achieving true safety.

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# CHAPTER 7

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## Case Studies of Rebirth in the Cycle of Existence

## Chapter 7

### Case Studies of Rebirth in the Cycle of Existence

#### Units in this Chapter

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#### Chapter at a Glance

The Triple World [*tribhava*] is the substrate to all forms of life and living beings condemned to be reborn from one realm to another inside this cosmic system according to the merit or demerit, wholesomeness or unwholesomeness they have accrued. Rebirth in the cycle of existence has been going on so long it is hard to find a beginning or an end to it. Only by uprooting all the remaining defilements in one's mind can one manage to break free of the cycle of existence completely.

#### Chapter Objectives

Students will have the knowledge and understanding to be able to appropriately compare and reason the working of the Law of Karma which has led to present day and afterlife situations.

#### Introduction

Learning cosmology has opened up a new world for many of us. It deals with issues that we probably have never heard of or thought about before. We have grown up in a world of science and technology. Life-long education in the fast-growing subjects of science and technology has shaped our thought processes. This, together with the prevailing materialism of society, has made us devote less and less attention to subjects like cosmology.

Scientific knowledge is developed by testing assumed hypotheses made up on the basis of preexisting theories. Many well-established theories have been proved wrong at a later date when science and technology have advanced. It is

possible that in the next millennium, our understanding of nature might be drastically different from that we know today. So what sort of ‘absolute’ knowledge can we trust never to go out of date? Knowledge gleaned from science and technology undeniably benefits us in many aspects of life. Where science starts from observation, experiment hypothesis, analysis and establishment of theories, the study of cosmology starts with the cause, known to the Lord Buddha not by hypothesis but through enlightenment. His wisdom came from his insight into the true nature of all matters and therefore was absolute and timeless. His enlightenment allowed him to see all aspects of the universe as clearly and simply as we might look at an object and turn it over in our hands.

In fact, none of the things the Buddha found were invented by him. On the contrary, he observed existing truths that no-one else had made sense of. More than 2,500 years ago, the Lord Buddha attained the enlightenment and presented the wisdom he had discovered to the world. These teachings, as recorded in the Buddhist scriptures, have stood up to the test of time benefiting us all, generation after generation.

## **7.1 The Repeated Cycles of Rebirth of All Beings.**

Previous chapters have described the structure and characteristics of the universe and the nature of elements constituting it. Additionally, they have addressed the origin of human beings including how we were born, what we were in previous lives and where we are likely to go in the future. We also learn that our traverse of the different realms is governed by the degree of merit and demerit which we have accumulated for ourselves.

The human realm is rather like a ‘common market’ offering merit or demerit instead of merchandise. When a being is in human form, it is able to accrue the maximum of merit or demerit for itself by its actions. Beings may have come into the human realm from different places including the human realm, heaven, the form-brahma realms, the formless-brahma realms and the unfortunate realms whether it be the major hells, the hungry ghosts, monsters or animals. However, no matter where we are from, as soon as we are born, in human physical form, although we may be of different nationalities, we will find ourselves endowed with the full physical strength, wisdom and capability, social status and standard of living to make choices about how to live our lives – either by making merits or burdening ourselves with bad karma.

Our human realm is similar to a place where we can choose how we invest our gifts -- in merits or in demerits. The merit or demerit which we accrue will not disappear but accumulate and result in happiness or suffering in our lives. It is *us* who dictate our own life. Our future, extending to the next life, is in fact in *our* control and will reflect what we have done today while we are alive.

For a better understanding of how rebirth in the cycle of existence hinges on behavior in the human realm as compared to a ‘common market’, see Figure 1. The figure shows rebirth to and from the human realm from other realms.

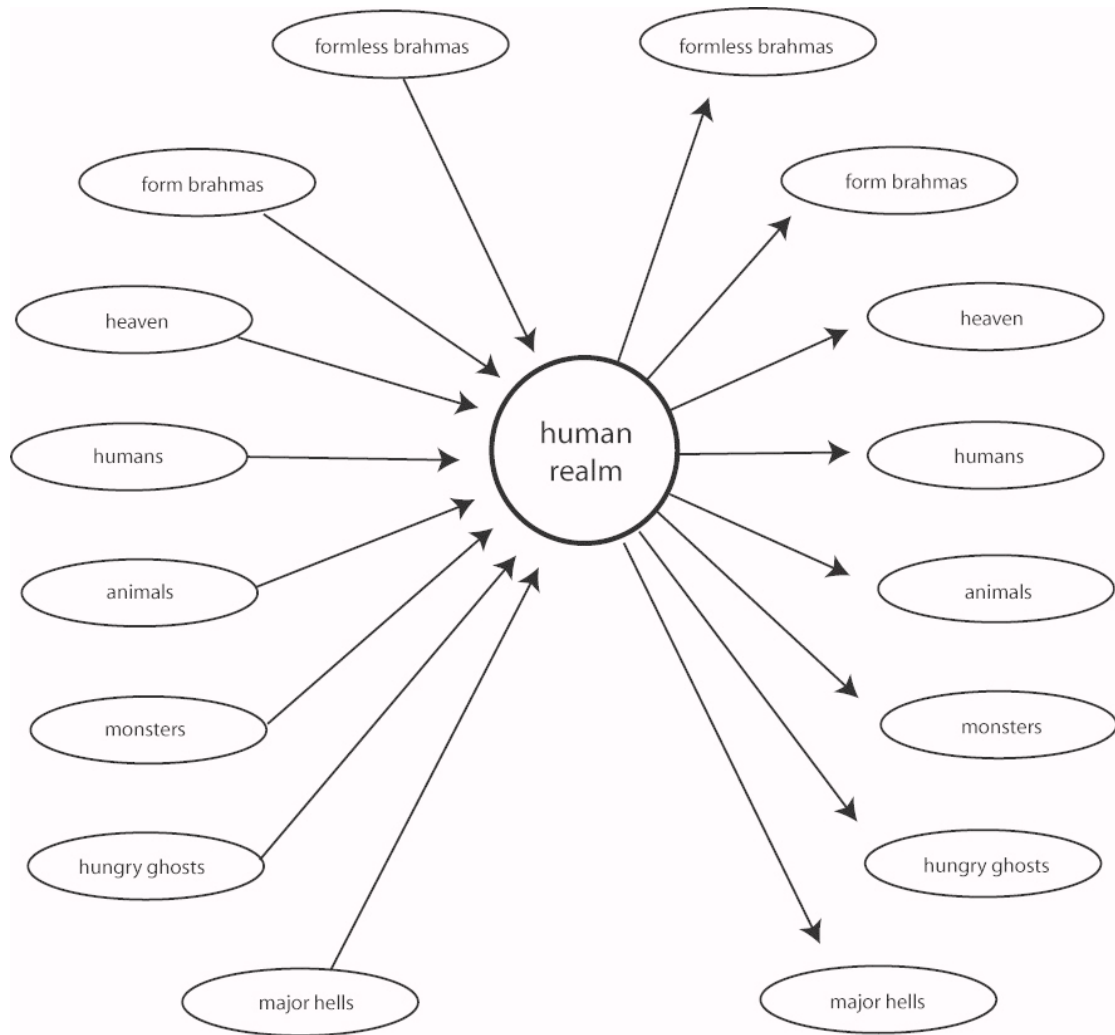


Figure 1. Possible Paths of Rebirth to and from the Human Realm

From the diagram, it is clear that beings can come to the human realm from many other realms. Where they go to after the human realm depends primarily on the merits and demerits they have cultivated while human beings. At the end of their lives each go to different realms, some to better ones, some to worse ones, all depending on nothing but their merits and demerits.

## 7.2 Case Studies: Real-Life Scenarios of Life after Death

The merits and demerits done in our human life dictate our afterlife destination and our quality of life there. For a better understanding of this subject, some illustrative case studies based on true stories of life after death from the Dream Kindergarten program are reproduced here by way of illustrative example.

### 7.2.1 From the Human Realm to the Brahma-Realm

#### ***Rebirth in the Brahma realm through attaining the absorptions<sup>1</sup>***

Once in Thailand, there was a farmer, who was generous, loved to practice meditation and kept the precepts regularly. He attended the temple every Buddhist quarter moon day and was a head of the temple's lay congregation. He had asthma, the symptoms of which subsided when he practiced meditation – making seeing a doctor or medication unnecessary.

He died of old age at seventy-five after being bedridden for two months. During that time, he had taught his daughter about the nature of life by using his body as an example.<sup>2</sup> Eventually, he informed his daughter that he would die the next day. He asked his daughter to buy robes and monastic requisites with his money to make a meritorious gift to the monks for one last time at his home.

After he had requested the Five Precepts he offered the gifts to the monastic community [*sa'ngadaana*] poured water to dedicate the merit and received the monks blessing. He then meditated for over two hours before inviting the monks claim picked-up robes and meditated further for another two hours before bidding his children farewell and passing away peacefully.

After his spirit left his body he arose as a Brahma, in the realm of the great Brahma's ministers with a crystal heavenly mansion as a result of having practiced meditation regularly and attaining the initial stage of the first absorption. His mind was very bright. Although he had not yet attained the sphere of Dhamma inside, his mind was bright inside the whole of the time.

He had suffered from asthma because in this human life and previous lives he had overworked his beasts of burden. However, his meditation practice in this life managed to suppress the retribution of this karma and allowed him to be reborn in the Brahma realms.

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<sup>1</sup> Dream Kindergarten Case Study: August 27, 2003

<sup>2</sup> That his body was breaking down, because it is of a nature of body is impermanent, unstable and unpleasant. One should be disenchanted with it. One should reach dispassion concerning it. One should liberate oneself.



## 7.2.2 From the Human Realm to the Heaven Realms

### ***Born in the sixth level of heaven due practicing generosity out of faith***<sup>3</sup>

There was once a sweet tempered old Thai lady who loved the Buddha's teachings and was devoted to them. She ordained as a nun, practiced meditation and resided at Wat Lam-mangka. A month before she passed away, she requested her niece, who had nursed her in the last days of her life, to invite monks to come to her house. She had offered food to monks and received a blessing from them every day for a month. It is interesting that during this one-month period, she had not eaten anything. She was not ill and looked healthy. She passed away in her sleep so peacefully that the niece asleep beside her didn't realize until the morning.

The lady had died of old age. Her spirit left her body and saw a heavenly chariot that looked like a gold-crystal mansion with a very large heavenly retinue. They all came to welcome her into heaven and brought her to the sixth level of heaven. Her heavenly mansion was very refined and beautiful and was made of gold-crystal, as clear as a diamond, encrusted with many different types of gems. This was a consequence of her practicing generosity with a mind endowed with faith in the power of generosity and the Triple Gem, while observing the Eight Precepts during the final period of her life.

### ***Born in the fourth level of heaven after a short but meritorious life***<sup>4</sup>

There was once a young Thai man who had behaved virtuously throughout his life. He didn't smoke or drink and was loved by his family members and relatives. He had had a difficult childhood. As an oldest son, he had to help his mother with work and taking care of his younger siblings. He had to undergo an operation on a heart valve when he was twenty-two. He had been married with three children. He owned a business selling construction supplies. He was a hard working person and had done very well in business.

His whole family came to the temple every first Sunday of the month and had joined long courses of meditation during the holidays. On the night of May 6, 2002, his wife found him lying unconscious on the restroom floor. She knew he was dead because his body had turned blue and had no pulse. She rushed him to the hospital but was told that her husband had already died of a heart attack. He was only thirty-seven years old.

After he died, his spirit left his dead body but did not go far. He still had worries about his family and so his spirit lingered around them at their home without realizing he was already dead. In this case, the man had a sudden death, so the images [*gatinimitta*] that flashed before him before

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<sup>3</sup> Dream Kindergarten Case Study: August 27, 2003

<sup>4</sup> Dream Kindergarten Case Study: September 13, 2003.

he died were not clear and his mind was neither clouded nor radiant. He tried unsuccessfully to communicate with his family. No one could see or hear him because he was in a different dimension. He only realized that he was dead when he witnessed his own funeral.

After seven days, when his attachment and worry about his family had diminished, he was able to recall all the merit he had done during his life. Together with the merits his family had dedicated for him, his mind became clear and his spirit started to become radiant. His astral body transformed into a celestial body. A golden heavenly chariot of medium size, encrusted with precious stones together with a retinue of angels appeared to him and took him to circumambulate the Dhammakaya Cetiya clockwise. He was filled with joy and went to the fourth level of heaven by the power of his merits.

He lived a short life due to bad karma in his past life. He had been a soldier and had killed a lot of enemies -- the main cause of his untimely death. His heart failure was a consequence of animal abuse, in this case, a horseback messenger in the army in another lifetime. He rode many horses to death in order to get his messages to their recipients on time. This bad karma would continue to follow him for many more lives to come.

***Falling from heaven to human realm because of resentment, later to return***<sup>5</sup>

There once was a kind Thai lady who always had a smile on her face. She never cursed anyone – she was never irritated or mad at anyone. She never spanked her children. She cared for her mother out of gratitude until her mother passed away. When she no longer needed to care for her mother, she dedicated more time to practice meditation. She attended the temple for every major meritorious ceremony and every first Sunday of the month. She donated two Buddha images for the Maha Dhammakaya Cetiya and was a major donor for the Kathina ceremony in 1991, offered gold for the casting of golden image of the Great Abbot of Wat Paknam together with many other merits.

One day when she was lying reading a Dhamma book and was recollecting in joy all the good things she had done throughout her life, she sat up and extended her two arms as if she was expecting to receive something. She then lowered her arms, closed her eyes, smiled and passed away at the age of 72. She was a healthy lady without ailments.

What made her act in that way was quite interesting. She had heard someone calling her name, so she sat up. In front of her, she saw many beautifully dressed female angels whom were her own retinue. They brought her a garland which she happily extended her arms to receive. Then she passed away because her time had come. Her spirit left her

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<sup>5</sup> Dream Kindergarten Case Study June 16, 2003

body as a beautiful celestial body. Afterwards, she and her retinue got onto a two-wheeled heavenly chariot of medium size made of gold and encrusted with gems. This took her to a big heavenly mansion in the second level of heaven.

Before she had been born as a human being in this life, she had been a female angel in the second level of heaven living with her partner, a good-looking male angel who had a bright aura. Her partner was an eloquent speaker and popular amongst the host of angels. His popularity made her resentful, causing her to come to an end of her angelic life and be reborn in the human realm. Before she passed away from the heaven realm, she made a garland and resolved that if her husband still loved her, he should bring it to her. Her husband saw the garland when he came back to their heavenly mansion. He understood what was going on immediately and kept watching over her on the planet earth until her time as a human came. Afterwards, he send a retinue with that garland to invite her back to the second level of heaven.

### ***Born in the third level of heaven***<sup>6</sup>

There was once a Thai Buddhist monk who had ordained for thirty-one years before passing away on March 19, 2003 at the age of 57. At the age of eleven, he had ordained as a novice at a temple in Nongkhai province. He went to different Buddhist schools and was able to complete all the courses successfully, then moved to Wat Naklang in Bangkok. Later he went to India for four years and graduated with a masters degree. However, he felt tempted to leave the monkhood after he got back to Thailand. He told his plan to the abbot of Wat Naklang, who then took him on a *dhuta"nga* pilgrimage in the jungle for more than ten years. There he had studied meditation and traditional medicine. He became skilled in these subjects and had helped the abbot curing the sick for many years.

In 2001, he was elected abbot of his own temple. He built four monastic dwellings, paved the road surrounding the temple, renovated the bell tower and pavilion. His last uncompleted project was to build a school for Buddhist study. He passed away while he was taking a nap after lunch. A month before he passed away, he often suffered from pustules. He had had an operation to get rid of the pustules just two weeks before his death.

The temple's M.C. brought his body to the hospital. The doctor tried to revive him but stopped after being certain that the monk was already dead. He was about to inject the corpse with formalin when suddenly there was a power cut. The reserve power cut in instead, but this soon fused too. The monks' followers asked the doctor to inject the body at the temple instead. They moved the body and this time the injection was

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<sup>6</sup> Dream Kindergarten Case Study: April 22, 2003.

successfully given -- but soon afterwards, the power went down for the whole province, and there were strong gales and heavy rain.

All the unexpected incidents were caused by the strong wish of this dead monk who was not yet ready to die. He wanted to carry on his work for Buddhism. He unsuccessfully tried to get back into his dead body and thus did not want the doctor to inject him. He understood that if his body were injected with formalin he would have no further chance of revival. He had recollected all his merits and made the wish that no one could give him an injection. The power of his merit caused the power cut and the unusual incidents at the hospital.

Afterwards, he followed his dead body back to the temple and eventually accepted his death. He thought about his merits and his body changed into an astral body and eventually a celestial body with all the trappings of heaven. The heavenly chariot and his retinue appeared to him and escorted him to the third level of heaven.

The heavy rain and gales at the temple, however, was caused by the power of tree-, air- and earth-sprites, who were in deep sadness at the death of the monk. When the monk was alive, he had always spread loving kindness to them whenever he made merits. Now without the monk, they had no merit to rejoice in.

The monk often had pustules as a consequence of his hard working in the present life and also false words in his past life. When he was a novice in his past life, he had been stubborn and answered his monk master back, causing his master to be irritated and feel resentment. The surgery he had on his chest was because of his disobedience to his parents and seniors. He had been too self-confident and often argued and threatened his elders and betters, upsetting them. He lived quite a short life because of having killed in previous lives.

### **7.2.3 From the Human Realm to the Human Realm**

*Born as a woman because of having been adulterous<sup>7</sup>*

There was once a Laotian man who had emigrated to Chicago. He was handsome and often messed around with other men's wives. After he had listened to teachings on the Ma'ngala Sutta especially about the consequence of sexual misconduct, he understood the law of karma and stopped his adulterous behavior. He became a better person and regularly went to the temple, practicing generosity, keeping the Five Precepts, meditating and doing chanting morning and night. He donated Buddha images on the Dhammakaya Cetiya for himself and everyone else in his family. Later, He had kidney failure and passed away soon afterwards. With his attachment and love for his family, his mind was

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<sup>7</sup> Dream Kindergarten Case Study: February 15, 2003.

neither clouded nor radiant and his spirit lingered around them at their home. On the seventh day, denizens of purgatory appeared to him and brought him to purgatory. The judge in the purgatory revealed his unwholesome behavior and the scenes of him committing adultery were brought up on the screen in front of the judge's throne. He watched those pictures with sadness and guilt until images of his good karma were displayed. This delighted him and allowed his mind to become clear and radiant.

The judge's verdict was that he should be given another chance in the human realm. He requested to be born in his own ex-family again due to his close ties with them. At that time, his ex-daughter got married and became pregnant. His spirit was then drawn to her and born as her child. He was born female since he had been adulterous in his most recent life.

He had a short life and again died of kidney failure because in a previous life he had been a soldier who had fought and killed many enemies particularly by stabbing them in the kidneys.

### ***Short life from the bad karma of killing***<sup>8</sup>

Once there was a Thai boy who was brought up by his mother after his parents got divorced. His mother loved him very much and he loved her too – always doing what she said. When he was sixteen, he and his friend had a car accident; he was killed but his friend survived. After he died, his spirit parted from his body not realizing that he was dead until he saw his own corpse being carried away. He thought of his mother and returned home to see her. He tried unsuccessfully to communicate her. On the seventh day, the denizens of purgatory escorted him away to purgatory. The judge there weighed up his merits and demerits and decided to send him back to the human realm. He was born again in a family of high standing as a consequence of his past merits.

He had lived only a short life because he had killed two people in a previous life. He had been in love with a woman who already had a boyfriend. He was jealous of them and hired a hit man to kill them both. After he passed away from that life, he was sentenced to serve his time respectively in the major hells, the satellite hells, purgatory, the hungry ghosts, the monsters, the animal realm and then as human beings who either faced tragic accidents or were murdered.

#### **7.2.4 From the Human to the Animal Realm.**

##### ***Born as a gecko in retribution for killing geckos***<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Dream Kindergarten Case Study: December 19, 2002.

<sup>9</sup> Dream Kindergarten Case Study: August 15<sup>th</sup>, 2003

There was a Thai non-Buddhist who married a Buddhist lady. He had a broad mind and never forbade his wife from Buddhist merit-making. He even participated in some meritorious events himself, including the offering of Kathina robes or picked-up robes.

Every Friday, he took his duty of killing geckos seriously. The prophet of his religion was captured by the enemy while hiding in a cave due to noise- geckos made. He considered geckos his enemy since he had a great faith in his prophet. He performed this duty even though his wife warned him otherwise. In addition to killing geckos, he drank, gambled and smoked. He suffered from asthma and other diseases. He eventually died of a brain hemorrhage. After his death, his relatives made a donation to build a Buddha image on the Maha Dhammakaya Cetiya in his name and transferred merit to him.

He was confused and not completely conscious while he was dying. The last thing he saw before he died was darkness and geckos appearing to him. His spirit was drawn into an egg of a pregnant gecko – a consequence of his habitual practice of killing geckos. Considering his bad karma from habitual killing, smoking, gambling and drinking, he would have normally have been drawn to the major hell realms. However, he went to the animal realm because the merit he had done in Buddhism postponed the retribution of that bad karma.

In the animal realm, he could not receive any merit dedicated to him by his relatives. He would have to be reborn as a gecko for many life times to come. When the karma from his killing was exhausted, other karma, meritorious or otherwise, would gain the upper hand. If merit gained the upper hand, he would be born again in human realm. If demerit were to gain the upper hand he would find himself either in the major or the satellite hells. His brain hemorrhage was caused by karma he had built up for himself in the present lifetime by killing geckos, drinking alcohol, smoking and gambling.

### ***The karma of an owner of a duck farm***<sup>10</sup>

There was once a man who originally came from China and made a living by operating a duck farm. He bought ducklings and raised them to egg-laying age. He collected and sold their eggs. If ducks did not lay enough eggs, he would sell them to the slaughter house. He fed them on shellfish, boiled and minced with fish to get red-yolked eggs.

He was a kind person – always helpful and generous to his friends – but smoked and drank a small cup of alcohol-based medicine every day. He occasionally made merit at a local Chinese shrine and practiced giving to the poor.

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<sup>10</sup> Dream Kindergarten Case Study: June 26, 2003

Every evening, he went to see Chinese friends and had cups of tea with them at the fresh market. One day he told his wife that he was sick and about to die after he got back from the market. His wife and children tried to give him first aid but he had a heart attack and died at the age of seventy-six.

Before his death he was upset because he was insulted by his debtor's daughter. His mind was very clouded, allowing demerit to gain control of the images [*gatinimitta*] flashing before him as he died. He saw and heard the ducks he had raised both for eggs and slaughter. Those images led him to be reborn in the animal realm as a duck that was slaughtered over and over again until this retribution be exhausted.

### 7.2.5 From the Human Realm to the Realm of Hungry Ghosts

#### ***Born as a hungry ghost because of stinginess and insulting monks***<sup>11</sup>

There once was a Chinese man who immigrated to Thailand from Shantou in China. He passed away at the age of seventy-two.

When he was a young man, he struggled to raise his family because he had ten children. He had a better financial situation when he reached the middle age. He was not very close to his children because he also had a mistress and spent most of his time with her. Generally, he did the sort of charitable good works Chinese people like to do, but he refused to give support to Buddhist monks. He considered them lazy because they did not work. He passed this prejudice on to all his sons. He had five sons and five daughters. All his daughters, however, loved to support Buddhism like their mother (his wife).

He maintained strong health until the last period of his life when he developed symptoms of diabetes and high blood pressure. He passed away peacefully in his sleep, while lying on his side hugging his bolster looking as if he was still alive.

His spirit left his body and lingered around his own home for seven days. On the seventh day, the denizens of purgatory and brought him before the courthouse of purgatory. They dragged him there against his will, filling him with fear. In front of the courthouse, there were lines of newly deceased, naked and of many different nationalities, both men and women. He was brought before the judge in the purgatory [*yamaraaja*]

The judge in the purgatory questioned him about his past life and asked him, "Do you know why you are here?"

He answered humbly that he didn't know, saying, "Don't hurt me! Please let me go!"

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<sup>11</sup> Dream Kindergarten Case Study: September 22, 2003.

“You will be allowed to go only after your merits and demerits have been reviewed.” The judge ordered the prosecutor (representing the bad deeds the victim had done) [*suvaanalekhaa*] to check on the man’s record of unwholesome deeds. His bad karma showed up scene after scene on a screen in front of the judge’s throne, especially his infidelity to his wife and his negative attitude towards monks and having insulted them.

The man felt sad and guilty looking at his past, his body turned dull. The judge ordered the defence (representing the good deeds the victim had done) [*suva.n.nalekhaa*] to check on the man’s record of wholesome deeds. Scenes of him making merit, although not very numerous, appeared on the screen including the donations he had made for social work. Consequently, he was led from purgatory through an exit into the realm of the hungry ghosts. His body was now black, thin and tall with maggots filling his mouth. He had bad breath and body odor, which came as a consequence of having looked down on monks. His genitals were huge and heavy due to the bad karma he had accrued by his infidelity. In this realm, luckily he was able to receive merits from his relatives, which helped reduce the time he would have to spend undergoing retribution there.

***Being reborn as a hungry ghost with a heavenly mansion because of insulting monks***<sup>12</sup>

Once there was a poor Thai farmer who struggled to raise his seven children. None of his children completed their schooling, because they had to help him in the fields. Their diet consisted of mere vegetables and fish caught from a nearby river.

He was a family man who was faithful, trustworthy, persistent and hard-working. He was good at his work and subsequently enjoyed a more comfortable quality of life. However, he did not believe that one’s deeds earned merit or demerit and consequently performed no significant deeds of merit or demerit. Once in a while, he offered food to monks, raised funds for Kathina or robe-offering ceremonies or helped with ordination ceremonies. It was not until the last period of his life, that he cultivated more merit at the persuasion of his daughter. Behind his daughter’s back however, he told other people that he did not believe in heaven or hell and insulted the monks.

He lost his appetite and memory with age during the last period of his life – but would let no doctors tend him.

Before he died, negative images flashed before him of shrimps, shellfish, crabs and fish he had killed and of himself insulting monks. These

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<sup>12</sup> Dream Kindergarten Case Study: February 22, 2003.



negative images alternated with positive images of himself occasionally doing meritorious deeds. His mind was neither radiant nor clouded. On death, his spirit lingered around his home for seven days. On the seventh day, the air-sprites responsible for his area brought him to the village of hungry ghosts possessing heavenly mansions [*vemaanikapeta*].<sup>13</sup> These hungry ghosts spent their nights as hungry ghosts and their days as tree-sprites. He had a silver palace of moderate size floating at the level of the treetops.

During the day, at the time he was a sprite, he had plenty of food from the merit he had done. However, at dusk, he felt anguish and was compelled (by his karma) to bolt out of the mansion and turn into a hungry ghost. This was a consequence of his not believing in heaven, hell or the law of karma. He had a big, tall body which was festering and wiry. His mouth was filled with maggots from the bad karma of insulting monks. He found himself in great pain and kept shouting “Now I believe it! Now I believe in heaven and hell!” With his mouth full of maggots, he was unable to say anything very clearly. His suffering led him to believe he was already in hell. Nonetheless, he was *not* in hell and had no idea that the torture in hell was more intense still.

He could not wait for dawn and to be free of pain and to transform back into a sprite. The suffering made him feel that the night was never-ending.

### ***Saved from a major hell by merit his son transferred***<sup>14</sup>

There was once a Thai man who worked hard to support his family by opening a small shop selling alcohol while slaughtering fish, ducks and pigs. He was a big man weighing 125 kilograms but suffered from diabetes. He was addicted to gambling especially with dice and managed an underground lottery.

Nonetheless, he was a kind person, loving to help his community and volunteered as a committee member at a nearby temple. The community and all the monks loved him. When he was sick, his son – also a temple volunteer – attempted to remind his father of the merit he had done as he died. His son knew how the images flashing before one as one dies [*gatinimitta*] dictate a dying person’s afterlife destination. His son informed him regularly of opportunities for meritorious deeds and persuaded him to make merit.

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<sup>13</sup> People are reborn as hungry ghosts possessing heavenly mansions because of having done a mixture of good and bad deeds. Some are hungry ghosts at night and angels during the day. They can have a lifespan of anything from a hundred years to a million. At the time they are able to enjoy their own heavenly mansion they know that these are the fruits of merits they have done during their human life and they dread the time when they will have to return to being a hungry ghost. Hungry ghosts with heavenly mansions come in three types: 1. earth-sprites with heavenly mansions [*bhumadevaa-vemaanikapeta*] which have their own villages of many types located on land, on water or beneath the water; 2. tree-sprites with heavenly mansions in the treetops [*rukkhadevaa-vemaanikapeta*] and; 3. air-sprites which have heavenly mansions in the air at a height of about one league above the earth [*aakaasadevaa-vemaanikapeta*]

<sup>14</sup> Dream Kindergarten Case Study: November 11, 2002

The father died at the age of forty-eight. Before he died, images flashed before him of himself doing both wholesome and unwholesome deeds. The images of killing pigs, fish and ducks, gambling, selling alcohol and drugs and running the underground lottery flashed before him as he died, but also pictures of him helping the community and volunteering as a committee member at the temple. His dying mind alternated between being radiant and clouded.

In the end, when his mind was more radiant than clouded, his spirit broke free from his body and wandered around in his home. His spirit attended his own funeral. He lingered in his own home for seven days but was unable to communicate with anyone. The earth-sprites responsible for his area approached and informed him, "You have a mixture of both merit and demerit therefore you will be sent to the realm of hungry ghosts with a heavenly mansion [*vemaanika-peta*] – the mansion being located in a mountain crevice near to your earthly home." He was then brought to his mansion, which was silvery-white with slight gold trim. As soon as he went through the entrance, his large body slimmed down to around seventy kilograms as a result of his merit -- merit from his son's ordination, merit transferred to him from his family and merit from his having built a Buddha image on the Maha Dhammakaya Cetiya. Without these merits he would have found himself one of the Major Hell Realms.

His mansion was situated in a mountain crevice. He was completely alone with no retinue, but had some angelic ambrosia to feed off as a result of the merits he had done. He was an angel during the day, but at night he felt anguish and was compelled to bolt out of the heavenly mansion. As soon as he left his mansion, his body turns into a hungry ghost which floated in the air as a result of bad karma he had committed by killing animals, gambling and selling alcohol. He had the body, head and trotters of pig, feet and wings of a duck and tail of a fish.

His head was on fire because of the bad karma of selling alcohol and running an underground lottery. Many metal dice engulfed in flame and a lesser number of metal playing cards rained down on his head. While undergoing this retribution, he was surrounded by a retinue of those who had committed similar bad karma and who had no shelter or place to live. Members of this retinue were brought to him by the head of the earth-sprites responsible for the area.

### 7.2.6 From the Human to the Hell Realm

#### ***Falling into the hell realms despite expecting to go to heaven***<sup>15</sup>

There was once a Thai non-Buddhist man who loved eating chicken. Everything he ate had chicken in it. He slaughtered a chicken in honor of every major ceremony in his religion,

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<sup>15</sup> Dream Kindergarten Case Study: August 15, 2003

Before passing away, he was severely ill and paralyzed. He curled himself up when sleeping like a headless chicken. He died oblivious, therefore the final images [*kammanimitta*] flashing before him were not clear. The spirit left his corpse and lingered around his home for seven days until the denizens of purgatory came and took him away for judgment.

He was very startled to find himself in the unfamiliar surroundings of purgatory because he had always been taught that he would be automatically entitled to join his god in heaven when he died. In front of the courthouse, there were lines of newly deceased, naked and of many different nationalities, both male and female. They all looked somber and afraid, waiting to be brought for trial.

The announcer called out his name and he was taken into the courthouse. The judge there questioned him about his life, name and address. He answered all the questions and insisted that he had a strong faith in God. The judge told him that he would be considered only on the basis of good and bad karma. The images of him slitting chicken's throats and ordering other people to do so, appeared on the screen at the front of the judge's throne. His mind became clouded when he saw those images.

The judge told him that killing and torturing animals was a grave demerit and sentenced him to be tortured by being cast into a deep abyss (in the first level of hell). The hole was filled with denizens of hell, which used huge swords to cut the throats of the victims. They died in extreme pain, only to be reborn in the same predicament and going through this sort of death over and over again.

***A distillery manager forced to inflict molten copper on others in purgatory***<sup>16</sup>

Once there was a Thai man who had become manager of a distillery at the age of twenty. He was very able despite having been educated only to the fourth grade of elementary school. He could speak many languages. At the age of twenty-five, he assumed the position of manager at factories manufacturing sugar, flour, alcohol and ice. He was lively, talkative and outspoken by habit and was involved in meritorious activities especially at a local Chinese shrine according to traditional Chinese beliefs.

Every Buddhist quarter moon day he would ask all his children to help their mother preparing offerings to be put them on the shrine as an offering to the Buddha in his home's shrine room. He also brought his whole family to a nearby temple. He gave donations whenever he was

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<sup>16</sup> Dream Kindergarten Case Study: June 16, 2003.

asked and had donated a Buddha image on the Maha Dhammakaya Cetiya. He only drank to be social.

He passed away at the age of fifty-nine on April 21, 1998, because of complications from ultrasound treatment to his gall bladder. His spirit left his body and lingered around his family for a further seven days until denizens of purgatory took him away for judgment. The judge there weighed up his merit and demerit and sentenced him to serve as a denizen [*kumbha.n.da*] inflicting suffering on others in purgatory.

In any heaven year he would serve nine months as a denizen in purgatory and have three months off (to enjoy a standard angelic existence). Later, when his family transferred merit to him, his sentence was reduced to only three months serving in purgatory. His duty in purgatory was to pour molten copper liquid down the throats of victims who had the karma of drinking alcohol.

***Reborn in the first level of major hell due to the bad karma of killing animals<sup>17</sup>***

There were once two Chinese immigrants who settled in Thailand as market gardeners. The wife died in childbirth and subsequently, he took a Thai woman as his wife.

As a young man he often went out hunting in the woods -- especially to catch wild roosters for food. His neighbors often requested he slaughter chickens, ducks and pigs on their behalf, when there were local festivities. He also liked to drink and gambled on the underground lottery.

When he reached the age of sixty-six, he started to develop a pain in his leg and a swollen knee. His symptoms were so severe that he could no longer walk. His family admitted him to the hospital where the symptoms were alleviated. After about a year, he developed a similar pain and went back into hospital. After taking medication for two weeks he started to observe a rash on his back. His illness worsened and he finally passed away at the age of sixty-eight.

Just before he died, images [*gatinimitta*] flashed before his eyes of all the animals he had killed including ducks, chickens and pigs. These scenes filled his mind with sorrow and darkened it. The final thing on his mind before he died was therefore darkness. When he died, the power of the demerit he had done drew him directly to the first level of the major hell [Sañjiiva]. Reborn in that hell, his body was huge and was half human, half animal. At first he had the head of chicken and the body of a human. The denizens of hell which had spontaneously arisen to inflict suffering on him through the power of his own bad karma, slashed or stabbed his throat, leaving him to die a painful death. As soon as he was dead he would be reborn in the same predicament dying again and again in the

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<sup>17</sup> Dream Kindergarten Case Study: July 30, 2003.

same way in the form of a half human, half animal of different combinations -- sometimes half human, half pig, sometimes half human, half duck, sometimes half human, half goose. He was decapitated innumerable times and always in extreme pain and suffering.

***Born in the third level of major hell due to sexual misconduct<sup>18</sup>***

There was once a Chinaman who emigrated to Thailand. He was employed in a drugstore. He was a womanizer and had affairs with four other women besides his wife. He had never been successful in his career and hardly lent his wife or family a helping hand. He was more involved with his other women and their families. He even asked his wife to help taking care of his latest mistress and her two children for eight years, even though his wife already had six children of her own. His wife was a very kind lady and bore the mistress no resentment.

He usually helped out with the chores at the Chinese shrine especially when there was a Chinese Opera. He was generally disinterested in meritorious deeds, although during one period he brought a tiffin set of food for the abbot of a certain temple out of faith.

During the last period of his life he suffered from heart disease and passed away in his wife's home. Before he died, images [*kammanimitta*] flashed before his eyes of all his sexual misconduct, causing his mind to be clouded. His spirit was drawn to be reborn in the third level of major hell [*Sa'nghaata*]. His body was huge with abnormally large genitals. Denizens of hell which had arisen through the strength of the victim's bad karma, cut open his chest, pulled out his heart and squeezed it, as retribution for hurting the feelings of his wife and children. He would die in great pain and reborn again. This time round, the denizen of hell hacked off his genitals with a sharp knife. Although barely alive he would be in excruciating pain for a long time to come.

His heart disease was a consequence of karma from a previous life when he had been a farmer who hunted animals for a living. The heart disease was the sum of the karma of killing in that life and the sexual misconduct in this life.

***Set free from hell by recalling merits<sup>19</sup>***

There was once a Thai lady who always made merits and practiced generosity whenever any temple appealed. In 1997, she heard of the construction of the Maha Dhammakaya Cetiya and attended the pile driving ceremony for laying its foundations. Along with many others, she joyfully participated in a ceremony for driving model piles. Later, she opened a seafood restaurant which served fresh seafood. She kept live

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<sup>18</sup> Dream Kindergarten Case Study: May 19, 2003.

<sup>19</sup> Dream Kindergarten Case Study: September 7, 2003.

fish and shellfish in tanks for customers to select. All her time was taken up by her restaurant and she had no opportunity to attend ceremonies at the temple any more. She had her restaurant business for only a few years before she fell ill and died.

Before she died the images of all the fish and shellfish she had killed flashed before her. This caused her mind to be clouded and the last thing on her mind before she died was darkness. She was reborn immediately in a satellite hell of the first level of hell. In this realm, the victims had different physical forms, some with the body of human and the head of shrimp, a crab or a fish. They all lined up before a hot cutting platform made of steel. Denizens of hell waited at the platform with a huge meat cleaver that was used to decapitate them one by one.

The remains of the victims were cut into little pieces. The denizens of hell gathered the pieces together in a hot steel net and set them aside. In this realm, dead victims would be brought back to life by being blown upon by a special kind of wind. Once reborn they would find themselves in the same predicament as before, being killed and reborn over and over again in excruciating pain and suffering.

She had taken the form with a fish's head and was waiting in line. On her way down to the cutting platform, she saw one victim on the floor with a metal stake being driven through its chest. A denizen of hell drove the stake in with a big mallet. The ringing sound of the metal stake as it was driven in reminded her of the sound she had made when driving the model piles at the ceremony for the establishment of the Maha Dhammakaya Cetiya. It was only now that she could recollect that merit and remembering one merit, all the other good things she had done came back to her. Suddenly her body became radiant. Her time as a victim in hell had ended and her good karma drew her to the heaven realms. She had a new celestial body and a small heavenly mansion in the second level of heaven.

### **7.3 Conclusions**

The case studies related here are only a small sample of those broadcast on the Dream Kindergarten program. It is obvious that the retribution which differs from person to person can be attributed to the wide variety of karmic deeds different people have done in the past and also the order in which karmic deeds give their fruits. The lifetimes covered in the case study are but a snapshot of the journey each being has made in the course of the cycle of existence. Each being, human or otherwise has already died and been reborn so many times that it is difficult to find a beginning or an end to it.

There are many occasions on which the Buddha taught about the extent of rebirth in the cycle of existence as have been recorded in the Buddhist scriptures:<sup>20</sup>

“O! Monks! You should understand my teachings as follows. The tears each one of us has cried in the course of rebirth because of encountering unpleasant things or being separated from loved ones and treasured things is more than the water in the four (cosmic) oceans – whether it be mourning the death of one’s mother . . . elder brothers and sisters . . . younger brothers and sisters . . . sons . . . daughters . . . diminishing of one’s extended family . . . diminishing of wealth . . . the decay due to ill health . . . the tears each one of us had cried in the course of rebirth because of encountering unpleasant things or being separated from loved ones and treasured things over the course of ages is more than the water in the four (cosmic) oceans – because it is hard to find a beginning or an ending to this cycle of existence [*sa.msaara*]. O! Monks! This fact is sufficient reason in itself to become dispassionate concerning this body, to become disenchanting so that one may gain liberation.”

The Lord Buddha also indicated the incalculable length of cycle of existence by comparing the amount of milk we have suckled during our journey through cycle of existence to the amount of water in the ocean:<sup>21</sup>

“O! Monks! You should understand my teachings as follows. The milk which we have suckled at your mother’s breast in the course of rebirth in the cycle of existence is more than the water in the four (cosmic) oceans – because it is hard to find a beginning or an ending to this cycle of existence . . .”

The Lord Buddha also indicated the incalculable length of cycle of existence by comparing the amount of bones one has left behind in the course of the cycle of existence:<sup>22</sup>

“O! Monks! The cycle of existence is so long it is hard to find a beginning or an end to it. After being reborn again and again for an eon the if all the bones and skeletons they had left behind were collected together, it would make a pile as high as Mount Vepulla – because it is hard to find a beginning or an ending to this cycle of existence . . .”

The Lord Buddha also indicated the incalculable length of cycle of existence by comparing the amount of blood that has bled from our body in the course of the cycle of existence:<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Assuu Sutta S.ii.179

<sup>21</sup> Khiira Sutta S.ii.180

<sup>22</sup> Puggala Sutta S.ii.185

<sup>23</sup> Ti.msamattaa Sutta S.ii.187

“O! Monks! You should understand my teachings as follows. The amount of our blood that has bled, is more than the water in the four (cosmic) oceans, in births when you have been a cow . . . a sheep . . . a goat . . . a deer . . . a pig . . . a chicken . . . or as a murderer sentenced to beheading . . . the amount of our heads that have been chopped off, is more than the water in the four (cosmic) oceans in births when you have been a cow . . . a sheep . . . a goat . . . a deer . . . a pig . . . a chicken . . . or as a murderer sentenced to beheading . . . because it is hard to find a beginning or an ending to this cycle of existence . . .”

The Lord Buddha also indicated the incalculable length of cycle of existence by saying that there is no-one who has never been our relatives:<sup>24</sup>

“O! Monks! It is hard to find a beginning or an ending to this cycle of existence . . . it is hard to find a being who has never been our mother, father, big brother, little brother, big sister, little sister, son, daughter in the course of the cycle of existence . . . because it is hard to find a beginning or an ending to this cycle of existence . . .”

From the quoted teachings of the Lord Buddha given to monks during his time, it becomes clear that the length of cycle of rebirth is incalculable. It is hard to find a beginning or an end to it. Nonetheless, we can comprehend that we have been reborn uncountable times in different realms and as different beings depending on our karma.

Putting the understanding of the cycle of rebirth in perspective, no life experience is really new to us since we have arisen in every life-form during our traverse of the cycle of existence. There is nothing new. There is nothing permanent. We should not cling to anything and neither can we go against the turning of the cycle. Therefore, the stronger we cling to ever-changing elements of the cycle of existence, the more severely we will suffer. Without the understanding the truth about life, we will be inundated with sadness in the infinite cycle of rebirth.

The wise ones see the change and impermanence of all elements. They feel no attachment towards those delusions and seek a path out of this maze of suffering. However, those still unable to see the truth, who still yearn for ephemeral pleasures, who are still caught up with what they used to be, need to prepare themselves to face the inevitable uncertainty coming to them.

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<sup>24</sup> Maatu etc. Suttas S.ii.189ff.



